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Philosophy

FELLOW TRAVELLERS

OR,

THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

MARGARET; OR, PREJUDICE AT HOME."

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

EDWARD THORPE, whose one idea was—a grand idea in its way—to be as useful as possible to his kind in a practical way, according to his opportunities, overlooked in the wife he had chosen the imaginative nature that would require ministering to, whether he ministered to it or not; and that, in the absence of sympathy on his part, would always remain alien to him. If he had been conscious of its existence in Avicé, he might have shrank away from it; or he might have supposed that, young as she was, it was possible to crush it out of her, if it stood in his way; or he might have made up his mind to bear with it, as something not likely to stand much in his way. But not being conscious of its existence,

he did not speculate about it at all; and the result of this ignorance was, that whenever it peeped out he drove it back, in the decided manner that showed it had no business with him or his concerns. If he had understood Avice better, to begin with—if he had been differently constituted himself—more pain, and that of a different kind, would have mixed with the pleasure with which he accepted her consent to become his wife. He would not so readily have dismissed such inevitable pain as he felt, be-

ring that all would be smooth work for her and himself in the future. The fact of his understanding Avice well in one point of view was a great matter; but such partial knowledge was not sufficient for a companionship that was to endure through life; and it was inevitable that one or both must suffer greatly.

For instance, if he had understood her so thoroughly as her brother had done—if he had been capable, like Phillip, of sympathising with her eager admiration and love of what was sublimely grand in nature—he would so have contrived that she should pass by daylight through the strikingly magnificent scenery that led to her future home, instead of at night in a post-chaise, the windows of which were closed on the dark-

ness without. Edward Thorpe himself was not sensible to such impressions; and he was not prepared to minister to any tastes that he would have considered merely a weakness in his wife.

Amid scenery so wild and rugged, and altogether new to her, Avice, however, could not fail to see much that impressed and interested her greatly, before reaching her home, that lay in the very heart of the Burnham crags. Before the chaise stopped, she became aware of a light outside, that deepened and widened as they advanced, until at length it streamed full upon the damp-dimmed window, with a strong red glare. Having alighted with Mrs. Ritson, and placed the latter's arm in her own, Edward Thorpe supporting the old lady on the other side, she lifted her eyes and beheld a novel sight. The red glare proceeded from six torches, borne aloft by as many men, picked men from the mine, to whom Edward Thorpe had delegated this task. Not so chosen by him for their personal appearance, or with any view of producing an effect (that would have been quite out of his way), but because of their general good character, they were, nevertheless, as fine specimens of the class to which they belonged as could have been selected—strong, iron-framed; grim as they had

come from their recent work under ground ; rough-looking even to savageness, in their mining dresses, and with their wild growths of hair on cheek and chin, and on their broad uncovered chests, they seemed to Avice to be in picturesque keeping with the rugged scenery amid which they stood, not together, but singly, and of which she now first obtained a glimpse. The ruddy, flickering glare of the torches revealed to her that opening in the stark, mountainous wall of grey rock that led to the mine, and that might have been the result of an earthquake, such huge, unshapen masses of the primeval stone lay about, either singly or piled in wonderfully grand disorder ; such heights soared above her, such black chasms yawned in their midst, the whole seeming inaccessible to the foot of man. There was a regular pathway, nevertheless ; and two by two the torch-bearers advanced upon it, the newcomers following, after Edward Thorpe had gently disengaged Avice's arm from Mrs. Ritson's, and placed her so that she walked alone, before these two.

"You are walking over the mine, Avice," he said presently. "There are two hundred men at work beneath you."

"And who are those men that I see up yon-

yonder?" asked Avice. "They are clinging to the rocks in all directions;—they are looking towards us."

Edward Thorpe saw them too, now. They were the miners, who had turned out to a man, to give the new mistress a hearty greeting on her way home. The torch-bearers came to a sudden halt, and then a loud, simultaneous cheer arose on all sides, awakening all the wild echoes of the rocks; the torch-bearers and the three miners who followed with the luggage of the travellers, joining in it. Edward Thorpe was evidently taken by surprise.

"How is this, Mallory?" he said, addressing one of the torch-bearers nearest him; "I didn't bargain for this, you know;—how has it happened?"

"It's t' men as would do it, Sir; I'd a notion they would," said Mallory. "To my thinkin it's all right."

Another cheer, louder than the first; another—and another, till the heights and depths all around rang again.

"Avice," said Edward Thorpe, grasping her arm, and his usually firm voice faltered a little, "this is done in honour of you;—it is a part of your welcome home."

Avice had been surmising as much ; and all her nature was strongly moved. She was gratified—grateful ; tears swelled in her eyes and flowed down her cheeks. She touched her husband's hand and returned its grasp.

“My friends,” exclaimed Edward Thorpe, lifting his hat, and this time his voice was clear and strong ; “I return you hearty thanks for myself and Mrs. Thorpe, who will not forget your kind thought of her ; God bless you all, and now good night.”

There was another cheer, more hearty if possible than those that had preceded it, and then while the echoes were dying away, the small cavalcade moved on. Avice walked like one in a dream, and yet like one having all her senses about her too. These were the rough men of whom Edward Thorpe had spoken to her in London ; respecting whom he had written to her ; the men in whom, and their wives and children, he felt so great an interest, hoping to associate her with him in the work of elevating them morally and socially. These men had made their own way to her heart already ; they had one and all communicated with her already, in the universal language that is always strong and true ; and, as her husband had said, she could

never forget their kind thought of her ;—she would repay their kindness in kind. These reflections and resolutions cheered and strengthened her. It was cheering, too, to feel assured that her husband (Avice herself did not so name him, even in thought—it was too strange to her), her friend, her protector, was well respected and loved by those placed under him. Altogether it was well for her to have had her heart thus stirred and her energies roused at the beginning of the new life upon which she was entering.

Following the guides amid scenery inconceivably rugged, and barren and wild ; along paths that were scarcely passable at intervals ; Avice stopped and looked behind her now and then in order to address a few encouraging words to Mrs. Ritson. That old lady, well supported by Edward Thorpe, was advancing with tottering but proud step, proud because she felt that once more she was in her element. Retaining her old idea that Mr. Thorpe was a very wealthy man, and having just received added proof of his greatness in the demonstration of the miners, she was in the best possible spirits ; and whilst Avice was communing within herself, she declared confidentially to Mr. Thorpe, that nothing ever pleased her better than to see, as she had just

seen, the retainers of an old family pay all possible respect to the head of it. Humouring her as he might have done a child, Edward Thorpe listened patiently, and replied in such a way as to satisfy her. It was curious to him, a studier of human nature, to observe what strange tricks old impressions were playing with this poor, enfeebled creature. Accustomed during the greater part of her life to be associated, and that closely, if in a humble way, with high families, she had acquired tastes and imbibed notions that dwelt with her when all other recollections of her life had died out. Loving the people she had lived with, giving up her heart and life to them, their downfall had been hers; and when she and the two children whom she had cherished as a mother were inevitably brought into contact with the Simpsons, she shrank from the Simpsons more than Avice did, because there was ever present with her an irritating consciousness of equality that was yet not equality, even as regarded herself, and an indignant protest that could find no voice, against the utter want of recognition that the claims of her young mistress to high consideration and perfect respect had met in the household of the draper. This experience had completely shattered the already early failing in-

tellest of Mrs. Ritson ; but there was a sort of strength in her that seized upon the readily offered help of Edward Thorpe, and that clung to it, and would not let it go. This strength had been brought to bear on Avice in her decision respecting Mr. Thorpe. It was the strength of very desperation, and now when there was no longer any need for it, all the real feebleness of Mrs. Ritson's mind became apparent. Totally forgetting many lamentable facts, she lived chiefly in a world of delusions ; but as the delusions chanced to be all happy ones, neither Edward Thorpe nor Avice sought to disabuse her of them. Avice, indeed, had the one satisfaction of knowing that the step she had taken had only just been in time to save her kind old nurse from a state of bodily and mental decay, in which only images of a distressing kind could have been presented to her.

After proceeding more than a quarter of a mile, Edward Thorpe desired the torch-bearers to halt, and then he directed Avice's attention to a small dwelling-house that stood far beneath them in a hollow surrounded by an amphitheatre of tall cliffs. The house, plainly seen by the light of the torches, looked even smaller than it really was, in contrast with the magni-

tude of the objects surrounding it. The two parlour windows and one of the chamber windows showed that there were fires and candles burning in those rooms, and a light streamed through the open doorway at which stood a single female figure. A darkly stern look passed over Edward Thorpe's face for an instant as his eyes first fell upon that figure, which he was conscious did not belong to either of his sisters. He had not led Avice to suppose that she would meet any of them on her arrival at her home ; he had left it to themselves to pay her that attention or not, giving them clearly to understand that they must not make their appearance except on the terms he had prescribed to them. Finding that he was terribly in earnest, that he was not to be trifled with in the slightest particular ; they had seen it expedient to give their assistance in arranging the house for her reception ; but they had given it under the constraint occasioned by their aggrieved feelings of many kinds ; though perhaps with some thought of their brother's great kindness to themselves, shown in many ways ; certainly under a conviction that they must not rebel against what he willed, and a consciousness that an open rupture with their brother would not,

under all the circumstances, be creditable to themselves. Whether they could at present so far further unbend as to be ready to receive and welcome Avice on her arrival, which would only be a graceful and sisterly act, Edward Thorpe could not say; and a suspicion that none of them were present in the house brought the stern look into his face of which we have spoken.

"This will be your home, Avice," he said, pointing to it, "you see that it is completely shut out of the world, as I told you."

A thought of that world—of all that she had suffered in it, all that she had lost in it, came over Avice for a moment, and caused her to shiver with a sensation as if her blood was turning to ice. "I like it—even because it is so shut out of the world," she said quietly.

As she approached the house Avice herself began to wonder whether she was about to meet any of the Misses Thorpe. The thought did not occasion her any trepidation; she was mercifully spared all knowledge of the fact of their being only prepared to regard her as an inferior and an intruder; and being kindly disposed towards them, as the sisters of one who had been a true friend to her, she rather wished that she might find them at the house, without having a

thought of considering their possible absence an offence. Her thoughts were too sadly preoccupied; she was too really indifferent for that to be; and at any moment she could readily forget that the Misses Thorpe were in existence. However, after taking leave of the guides, who respectfully bade her good night, and still walking in advance of Mr. Thorpe, who with Mrs. Ritson on his arm lingered behind to speak to one of the men; she began to feel rather awkward when she found herself standing alone close by the open doorway from which the female who had been seen from above had disappeared. She felt at the moment that a kind face and a friendly hand would have been pleasanter than this blank. Looking back, she saw that Mr. Thorpe was advancing, followed by the men bearing their luggage. When he came up to her he took her hand, and then she discovered that another individual was standing close beside her on the doorstep.

“Avice, my youngest sister:—Mrs. Thorpe, Susan.”

The two had taken each other by the hand. Avice looked up in the face of the stout, comfortable-looking personage to whom she was thus introduced, and she did not by any means

dislike its expression. Indeed, Miss Susan had a good-humoured kind of face, and in the main she was really good-natured: She had intended to be as stately and unfamiliar as was possible with the young bride; but her woman's heart was touched as she surveyed her slight, girlish figure; her almost child-like face, that was so very pale and sad-looking. So Miss Susan forgot all her previous resolutions, and bent down and kissed Avice, and behaved altogether in her own natural manner.

"Good gracious," she exclaimed, "how white you are—and so cold! Do make haste in; I've kept good fires; and I'm sure you must be so tired, coming over that ugly road. Good gracious, I hope you're not going to be ill!"

Still holding Avice by the hand, she led her into one of the parlours, and Edward Thorpe following introduced Mrs. Ritson, whose bonnet and outer coverings he proceeded to take off previous to installing her in a most comfortable-looking easy chair on one side of the fire-place. Miss Susan performed the same offices for Avice, seating her in a similar chair that stood opposite.

"You must both rest a bit and get warmed before you go up stairs, though you'll find a fire in your room, too," said Miss Susan, keeping at

Avice's side; smoothing from her forehead the dishevelled curls of dark hair; looking wistfully in her fair, pale face; and occasionally glancing at Mrs. Ritson, who, looking very dignified and happy, sat smoothing down the folds of a brocade black silk dress that had formerly belonged to Miss de Burgh. "My sisters desired me to give their best love, hoping you would excuse their not being here to-night, as they both have bad colds; but they'll come as soon as they can venture out," continued Miss Susan, who was greatly exceeding her orders without being able to help it. Edward Thorpe, looking pleased, as he was, here quitted the room; saying, as he went out, "We shall be glad to have tea as soon as it can be got ready, Susan."

"It will be ready almost directly," said Miss Susan, quitting Avice's side and approaching the window. "I didn't draw the blinds down sooner," she continued, letting down the folds of the drab-coloured damask curtains as she spoke, "because I thought it would be pleasanter for you to see lights in the windows when you first came in sight of the house, after such a dreary walk as I know you would have." And to do Miss Susan justice, this was strictly true; and Avice thanked her sincerely for having had

such kind thought for her. Always talkative, Miss Susan continued to chat very pleasantly whilst making preparations for tea, and occasionally making visits to the kitchen. During this interval, Avice took the opportunity of looking around her. Her impression, on first entering the parlour, had been, that it was the most comfortable, cosy-looking apartment she had ever entered, save and except that most home-like of all apartments—Phillip's snug sitting-room in the temple. *There* the light of love had settled upon everything, and made everything bright and familiar to her eyes; here was the kindness that has some kinship to love; and indisputably, judged by unprejudiced eyes, this room, considered of itself, and with its appointments, was far preferable to Phillip's. Everything looked fresh, and new, and bright, and yet most homely. Very new and glossy, shining in the fire-light, were the frames of yellowish-coloured wood and the green leather covers of the two chairs in which she and Mrs. Ritson were reclining; bright and new was the hearth-rug, with its white ground spotted with green, in which her feet sank; and the carpet that was also white and green. Bright and shining were the drab damask window curtains that Miss

Susan had just drawn together, and the Windsor chairs—all arm-chairs ; and the cheffonier painted in oak, and the round centre table that matched it ; and the rosewood work-table that stood before the window, and the small vase that stood upon it, filled with winter-blooming roses. And that centre table, how it glittered all over, spread, as it was, with a tea-service of white and gold, in the midst of which stood two tall, old-fashioned plated candlesticks, that Miss Susan presently told Avice were a wedding-gift from her sisters and herself. And the brightest of grates held the fire, whose flame went up the chimney with a pleasant little roar, and sparkled all over the hearth, bringing into strong relief the very brightest of fenders and fire-irons. Looking at all this—looking at Mrs. Ritson, who evidently felt very happy and important ; thinking of what her lot in the world might have been if she had been left to struggle alone, as those upon whom she had some claim *would* have left her ; Avice, with her loving and grateful nature, could not fail to be more than ever sensible of the disinterested affection and kindness that had rescued her from a future that could only be contemplated with dread ; and that to the best of its ability surrounded her with

honour and pleasantness in the present. It was impossible to give to this present the whole heart and spirit that were still chiefly engrossed by the dead past; any humble home that offered her a shelter would have been welcome to her; but it was impossible to avoid yielding to the influences around her, all so cheering and encouraging of themselves. So, tired and willing to be pleased, she sank back in the luxurious chair, and enjoyed the warmth and comfort of the bright little room, and thought of the kind Miss Susan; and for the moment felt almost happy in her thankfulness—so happy, that presently she began to reproach herself—to believe that she had been selfish—to feel that, while thinking so deeply of Mrs. Ritson in her heart, she was outwardly neglecting her. So she started up, and approached the old lady, and bent over and kissed her; asking her how she liked her new home.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Ritson, spreading out her ample skirts with great dignity, “I am satisfied—perfectly satisfied. My dear son has caused us to be received here with perfect respect. I am very much satisfied, indeed. I never saw a tenantry more attached than Mr. Thorpe’s are to him: that is particularly gratifying. You have not married beneath you, and

that is the chief consideration with me. Your husband is also one of the kindest of men. Where is he?" Avice told her that she would see him presently. Ritson appeared to her to be labouring under some new delusion; to be imagining either that Mr. Thorpe was really her own son or her son-in-law, by reason of his marriage with herself. This did not matter much, except that the state of Ritson's mind altogether was a great distress to Avice. She was pondering over this matter when Miss Susan entered, and asked both ladies to accompany her up stairs.

The chamber they entered was the largest apartment in the house except the kitchen, as it extended the length of one of the parlours and the passage. Looking first at the fire, Avice noticed that everything about it was bright, including itself, and that its flame went up the chimney with the same pleasant little roar that she had noticed as a characteristic of the fire below. There were two beds in the room, covered with the whitest of counterpanes, and hung with white dimity; and a couch having the same covering stood at the foot of one of them. The window-curtains were also of white dimity; and the first act of Miss Susan, on entering the room, was to draw them down. There was the

toilet-table, with its white cover and looking-glass; and other conveniences lay there that Avice noticed afterwards. There was the wash-stand, with its white service edged with green—that most verdant of colours being also predominant in the carpet, that was similar to the one below. The chamber chairs were also painted white and green; and there was a chest of drawers with its white cover; but the great convenience of the room was overlooked by Avice, and was pointed out to her by Susan—two immense cupboards, painted in oak, that occupied all the space on either side the fire-place.

“My brother told us,” said Miss Susan, “that you would like to have an extra bed in Mrs. Ritson’s room, so we placed the two here, this being the largest room. I hope Mrs. Ritson will like it.”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Ritson, rather stiffly, “I like it very much. My dear son is always thoughtful for me—very considerate, indeed! and I cannot be otherwise than satisfied with whatever arrangement he makes. Avice, my dear, I should like to wash my hands.”

Avice attended to her immediately; poured out the water, supplied her with soap, stood by

holding the towel ready for her use. Miss Susan, even in this early stage of her acquaintance with Mrs. Ritson, stood in considerable awe of her, as a very superior person, who had evidently been accustomed to expect, if not to command, attention from every one about her. Miss Susan subsequently reported of her, that she was very distinguished in appearance and manner—much superior, in these respects, to Mrs. Thorpe. And Miss Susan, on the alert to make discoveries, debarred as she was from openly questioning Avice, noticed particularly the fact of Mrs. Ritson always speaking of Edward Thorpe as her “son.” Could Mrs. Thorpe be the daughter of this old lady? Most probably she was her granddaughter; and this was the conclusion at which the speculators finally arrived.

Feeling in a manner constrained to pay respect to Mrs. Ritson, Miss Susan was ready to receive her, when she came out of Avice’s hands, asking if she would rest herself on the couch until Mrs. Thorpe was ready, or if she, Miss Susan, should at once accompany her down stairs. Mrs. Ritson chose to remain; and when Avice had hurriedly washed her hands and face, and combed out her hair, the three proceeded down stairs.

The centre table had received many additions

in their absence. There were dishes of thin-cut ham and beef, and piles of plum-cake and bread and butter; and a tea-urn was hissing in the midst; and almost simultaneously with themselves a respectable-looking servant-woman entered, bearing two plates, filled with hot cake. Edward Thorpe came in the room at the same moment.

"Bessy," he said, "I must introduce you to your two mistresses—Mrs. Thorpe and Mrs. Ritson. I am sure that you will always find them disposed to be kind to you."

Bessy was one of those frank, rather sharp-tempered servants, who always make the best of servants to such as are capable of comprehending that God has created all men in one flesh. These are ready to remember that something must be conceded to character, even where servants are concerned. Bessy could not help being familiar, because she was thoroughly honest and earnest. Glancing at her old mistress, and then looking wistfully in the face of her young mistress, Bessy said,—

"I'm sure I'm very glad to see both the mississes. If there's anything I can do to make them comfortable, they've only to say it, and it's done."

"Thank you very kindly," said Avice. "We could scarcely be more comfortable than we are just now."

"I like the look of Bessy very much," said Mrs. Ritson, raising herself in her chair; "and really, Bessy, the order I see everywhere is highly creditable to you. Of course, in my time I've seen a good deal of servants. I always hired ours myself; and I had a deal of trouble with many of them that I never could get to fall into my ways. In a large establishment there is always something the matter with one or another; and I think it a proof of your good sense, my dear son, that you have everything about you on a small scale. It is quite a treat to me to find myself in such a nice, quiet little house as this is, though, if some were living, they would wonder at my saying so. My dear son, I wish I could see you sit down."

"My dear mother," said Edward Thorpe, readily falling into her humour, "if you will take this chair, I will sit next you, and then I shall be able to attend to you properly."

It was quite evident that Mrs. Ritson expected to receive proper attention from all around her. What she had just said respecting her former large establishment and the numerous servants,

with whom she had found it difficult to deal, had the effect of rendering Miss Susan still more deferential in her manner to the old lady, whose speech and deportment altogether had impressed her from the first with a conviction of her having originally occupied a high position. Avice felt alarmed lest Mrs. Ritson should make some more definite disclosure respecting the past, notwithstanding the repeated warnings she had given her against doing so ; her failing memory, and the change that had latterly come over her altogether, having considerably lessened Avice's power over her. Edward Thorpe, however, had no such fears. He saw that Mrs. Ritson's intellect was so far impaired that she herself had no clear ideas respecting the past ; that she had even forgotten names ; and that the one principal impression remaining with her was, that she was herself a person of high descent, who had been accustomed to mix with the first society, and who was entitled to the profoundest respect, notwithstanding the family misfortunes, mistily alluded to sometimes, that had caused a great change in her position. It was singular that she entirely lost sight of Avice in this respect ; that she transferred almost wholly to Mr. Thorpe who had protected and rescued Avice from all

that she had dreaded for her, the affection that yet in this form survived only because of her child. However, Avice missed the affection that had hitherto been lavished solely and without measure on herself. It was a great trial to her to feel that for the future her lips must indeed be sealed to the past; since even Ritson could no longer sympathise with her, or linger with her over the recollections of other days. Other love she had won, but it was not a love that could repay her for the loss of Nurse Ritson's. It was a truth that she had never felt so completely alone in the world as she did some days after entering her own and her husband's future home.

During tea the brother and sister spoke together occasionally respecting matters known only to themselves; and at length Miss Susan asked him if he had heard anything in London of the young master.

"Only that he was pursuing his studies like one altogether in earnest," said Edward Thorpe, somewhat sadly. "I honour him very greatly: he gives promise of becoming a noble man."

"Dr. Frank was in London some time ago," continued Miss Susan, "and he told us he had heard that his chambers in the Temple, two

attics, were quite poorly furnished with some old rickety things that had belonged to a student who died many months ago. I think him a very odd young man. So rich as he is, he ought to be doing something better than burying himself there. Good gracious! Mrs. Thorpe, how white you have turned! I thought you'd be ill. Never mind upsetting the tea-cup. You'd better rest in the easy-chair again, and I'll bring your tea to you."

Avice declared that she had finished her tea; and as all were willing to excuse her, she retired to the easy-chair. Edward Thorpe knew that his wife's brother had been a student in the Temple, and that he had died there. He, therefore, supposed that the allusion to the Temple had occasioned her some emotion. He could excuse this, although he was generally hard upon weakness of any kind. He went on speaking with a consciousness that the worst was past.

"It is because Walter Osborne is so rich," he said (Avice by a strong effort restrained herself from giving a sudden start), "that I think so highly of him. It is no honour to any to be born to wealth or rank; but he who, especially in youth, can determine to act for himself independently of these possessions, is a

true man. Walter Osborne is the only man living of whom I ever heard whom I greatly envy."

Avice became giddy, faint, sick with a sickness of the soul, reclining there in the easy-chair. She had never mentioned Walter Osborne's name to Mr. Thorpe: she had not been aware that he knew him. Neither could Ritson have mentioned him to Mr. Thorpe, because all that she had felt most keenly had been kept by Avice in the recesses of her own heart. If Ritson had casually heard his name mentioned at Hampton Court, she had most probably forgotten it. Ritson seemed even to have forgotten Phillip, for this allusion to the Temple did not move her in the least. But who might tell how strongly Avice was moved! It was quite evident to her now, from all that had been said, coupled with all that was known to her, that this Walter Osborne, whom her husband so admired and envied—who was altogether so admirable, as she knew—had himself been the purchaser of Phillip's effects—was now in possession of them and of his chambers—studying there as Phillip had studied—thinking there of Phillip, whom he had so loved—thinking of herself, perhaps, sometimes; wondering what had become of her!

With a great overwhelming rush, Avice's native sympathies went back to all this ; and the cosy little room and all the people in it became to her at the moment as nothing—as nothing, except that she still listened eagerly to what the brother and sister said, because they continued to speak of Walter Osborne. How familiar to her were many of the names and circumstances mentioned by them ! How often, long before coming to Hampton Court, she had heard Philip speak of Staunton Court as the old ancestral home of the Osbornes, and of Mr. Osborne as an unworthy father of a noble son ! All she now learned confirmed all that she had learned so long ago. There she sat, listening greedily to those details into which her husband could not conceive that she had the power to enter. Of course she understood now that the mine which Mrs. Ritson, to the end of her days, persisted in believing to belong exclusively to Edward Thorpe, was the property of Walter Osborne. Not far from her stood the house in which he was born, and his early childhood had been passed in the neighbourhood. For ever she would be hearing something respecting him, and for ever she must be silent respecting him herself. Her husband had so willed it : he

would have nothing of her past revived ; so Avice, a dreamer by nature, was likely enough to find no satisfying life beyond her dreams.

Before Miss Susan returned to her own home that night, escorted by Tom, who made his appearance armed with a great horn lantern—the veritable loutish Tom, who more than twelve months before had acted as guide to Charles Moore and James Fraser ;—Avice had become more intimately acquainted with the interior of the small house over which she was in future to preside. Edward Thorpe himself took her into the adjoining parlour, where she found the same bright fire with its accompaniments, the same drab-coloured window curtains, the same Windsor chairs—all arm chairs—the same easy chairs standing on either side the fire-place, only these were covered with purple leather, and purple was also the predominant colour in the carpet and hearth-rug. The round centre table was of mahogany, a regular library table with drawers all round ; and a lamp standing in the centre of it, with its ground-glass cover, shed a subdued light. Two sides of the room were covered from floor to ceiling with bookcases filled with books—grave, heavy-looking books, all of them.

Here, as in the other parlour, there was no ornament, no chimney glass, not even a vase on the bare mantel-piece—no pictures.

“Here,” said Edward Thorpe, “I intend to pass what leisure time I shall have, with you for a frequent companion, sweet Avice—you whose mind I wish to form.” He kissed her forehead as he said this, and Avice felt grateful to him;—Avice, who was so abstracted at the moment, so halfstupidified with her crowding recollections of the past;—Avice, whose mind was already so far formed, that there was little left that he could do.

Then Miss Susan invited her into the kitchen, where everything looked brighter than ever:—the commodious kitchen stove, with its heaped-up blazing fire in the centre; the highly-polished dish-covers and other domestic utensils that glittered everywhere on the walls, that were painted in a cream-colour; the dressers, and tables, and chairs, all looking so clean and new. Dishes and plates were arranged on the shelves above the dressers, and all kinds of cooking utensils on the shelves beneath. Suspended from the ceiling were several hams and a side of bacon, and there was a pleasant smell of new-baked bread, for Bessy

was baking. Miss Susan opened several doors, and disclosed to the eyes of Avice, cupboards, and pantries, and store closets innumerable ; for the original occupier of the dwelling had built it for himself and his family, and with an eye to conveniences of all kinds. Miss Susan opened the outer door of the kitchen, and holding a candle in her hand, pointed out another door fitted into the fissure of the solid rock, beyond which, she said, was a large natural cavern, that, besides containing coals and wood, and everything that required putting out of the way, was the best of keeping places for several articles of consumption that she mentioned, it being at all times perfectly cool. Finally, Miss Susan placed in Avice's hands the keys respectively of the tea-caddy, and of a store closet containing pickles and preserves that had been supplied by her sisters and herself. That learned lady, Miss Thorpe—that hard, business woman, Miss Martha, had been capable of thinking of these things, and doing all this for the young stranger, whose presence in their midst they would gladly have been spared. They were inclined to make the best of a bad job. It was impossible for a nature like Avice's not to feel these attentions and be grateful for them ; but as the Misses

Thorpe gave, so she received them, having too little heart in the matter. Avice was at the moment too conscious of the higher wants within herself to which none might minister. Altogether she felt the truth of the saying—man cannot live by bread alone.

On the following day she was visited by Miss Thorpe, who did not appear to have any traces of a recent cold about her. Avice did not get on so well with Miss Lydia as she had done with Miss Susan, and Ritson felt herself greatly affronted by Miss Lydia, who did not seem inclined to defer to her at all. The next day brought Miss Martha, with whom Avice felt more at home. Avice was very ready to acknowledge to this experienced housewife that she knew nothing, that she was fit for nothing so far as household matters were concerned ; but she was teachable, and willing to be taught ; and so far, Miss Martha, who liked to dictate and rule, was satisfied with her. Mrs. Ritson, on the contrary, was highly offended, because Miss Martha had scarcely condescended to notice her at all : Miss Martha having been prejudiced against her by the report of both her sisters. Miss Martha professed to have no nonsense about her ; at any rate she could not bear with the nonsense of

other people. She was, herself, proud in her way; but the inordinate pride of this penniless old lady disgusted her. In this way a mortal enmity was established between Miss Martha and Mrs. Ritson, who complained to her dear son of the treatment she had received. Avice helped Edward Thorpe to soothe her; Edward Thorpe, who, so long as his wife appeared satisfied, was not to be greatly disturbed by the grievances, chiefly imaginary, of this poor imbecile old soul.

Next followed a formal invitation to Moorlands, which Avice accepted, and Mrs. Ritson declined. On this occasion Avice was introduced to the two visitable families of the neighbouring village, and also to the aged vicar, who took to her amazingly. Earlier in life he had lost his only child, a daughter, who died when she was about Avice's age, and she seemed half restored to him in Avice, in whom he discovered many points of similarity. For years afterwards, even until the time came in which his own head was to be laid low, he would pass in summer heat and through winter's snow and rain over to Burnham crags in order to spend a quiet hour with Avice, who, together with her husband, formed the sole society in the neighbourhood at all cal-

culated to satisfy the tastes of the intelligent and perfectly gentlemanly old man. Even on the occasion of this first visit to Moorlands, Avice formed a pretty correct judgment of the characters of her three sisters-in-law ; and it was plain to her that she could never be anything to any of them. In order to understand the inordinate family pride of the Misses Thorpe, it was necessary to see them in their own house ; and having done this, Avice felt that her own claims on that score, even if she could have brought them forward, would have been as nothing in comparison. So when her husband, in the course of his after teachings, ridiculed this kind of pride, she was ready to see and acknowledge the absurdity of it, the worthlessness of it, to the extent that it had been made to appear worthless and absurd to her. Also, during this first visit to the Misses Thorpe, she learned more respecting Walter Osborne, who formed one of the topics of conversation wherever two or more were gathered together. Some blamed him for keeping aloof as he did and leaving everything under the control of Mr. Rycroft ; but all allowed that Staunton Court and the neighbourhood might well be distasteful to him. The old vicar, who had known him well in his very early boyhood, de-

scribed him as having been "a gracious child," resembling his mother in many particulars. Altogether it seemed pretty certain that there was no chance of Avice ever being brought into personal contact with him in the wild region of which he was master. She believed herself to be thankful for this: she believed that she wished to put him out of sight altogether as an impediment in the way of what lay before her; but she was conscious of listening eagerly, and with a quickened beat of her heart, whenever his name was mentioned; conscious of avoiding her husband's eye at such times lest he should discover in her this emotion which it had never been in his own power to awaken.

It was wisdom in Edward Thorpe to find immediate and full employment for his young wife. As a popular measure, Mr. Rycroft, now a very great man indeed, co-operated with Mr. Thorpe in erecting a school-house for the children of the miners, to which a paid master and mistress were to be attached. This was to be accomplished partly by general subscription, but Mr. Rycroft himself giving liberally, the work was commenced at once, shortly after the arrival at Burham crags, of Edward Thorpe's wife. Two or three years previously Mr. Thorpe

had alone and unaided, commenced this reformatory work. He had caused a rough boarded shed to be erected not far from the mine, containing forms and desks as roughly put together, and here, drawing around him as many of the men and boys as could be persuaded to attend, he employed his own leisure hours in giving them instruction in reading and writing. No one understood better than himself the worth of example, and shortly, as he had expected, a few amongst the men who were steady and intelligent in comparison with the rest, voluntarily offered their services to help him. Having made this small beginning, Edward Thorpe had the satisfaction of seeing that the work prospered and went on, though slowly. He knew well enough that little could be done towards humanising the men and boys, so long as the women and the girls remained uncared for. Never before did man single-handed, contend with anything so formidable as the gross ignorance, the utter want of moral sense, the low vices and brutal propensities that characterised the whole mining population. The women, not less brutalised than the men, did their best towards promoting in wretched homes, the disorder and discomfort that seem to be the peculiar element of the civilised savage.

Lazy, slatternly, dirty, having no self-respect, having been themselves dragged up rather than brought up, these women dragged up their children, and drank with their husbands—and swore with them; and encouraged the latter's feuds with one another; and bound up their broken heads with a readiness that shewed they considered such work to be a part of their mission on earth; and frequently fought with one another, which was nothing to women who were used all along to be beaten by their husbands. Between fighting and drinking, and gossiping, little time was left to devote to the children, who soon learned to fight, and drink, and gossip on their own account. Here was enough and to spare, of that raw material, that regarded as the peculiar product of another soil and different social institutions, is pronounced to be marvellous. No one better understood all this than Edward Thorpe, but he was a man amongst ten thousand. He remembered that this rude population had been quite destitute of instruction, secular or spiritual, time out of mind. He knew that the grossly ignorant and rough men about him were still human, because he had found them accessible to kindness; because he had tried kind treatment, and had found it to succeed in softening their

natures, at least quite as well as brutality had, previously to his time, succeeded in knocking what little sense they had left, out of them. In this work of reformation amongst a people so apparently lost, Edward Thorpe intended to associate Avice with himself, and as a preliminary step, he at once formed a girls' class in the rude primitive school-room. He had formed a right estimate of Avice's high nature, that while it was not to be appalled by anything human, was capable of being attracted towards anything human. He knew well enough that any ordinary schoolmistress that could be engaged would complain bitterly of the difficulties in the way, if she did not allow them to conquer her altogether. He expected Avice to pave the way for such an inferior nature, and to perfect her own work afterwards. And Avice did not fail him. Besides that the many wounds in her heart might not heal, there being no skilful hand near to tend them, nor indeed any thought for them at all, so that familiarity with pain rendered her unfamiliar with any idea of pleasure or self-indulgence; the spiritual in Avice had at all times so far predominated over the animal, as to give a lofty tone to her whole character, and a stability that even thus early would bear putting to the

proof. Hers was one of those higher natures that delight in self-sacrifice, that find their greatest happiness in ministering to the happiness of others. The love that would have rendered all this ready yielding an exquisite delight, was no longer present with Avice now, but she was still bound to the performance of duties, and those sufficed to her in the absence of love. She took the place her husband had assigned to her, and, to the great wonderment, and a little to the scandal of the Misses Thorpe, said she liked it. Whatever the difficulties she had to contend with might be, she never spoke of them ; but before long she gave a cheering report of progress. It was a part of her husband's plan that she should visit the homes of the miners, and bring the influence of her gentle manners and speech to bear upon the coarse women, who he believed would treat her with perfect respect to begin with, because they already paid voluntary respect to himself. The old vicar of the moorside village, who had lived in the neighbourhood nearly half a century, and had never dreamed of effecting a reformation amongst these wild people, now seeing this young girl associated with her husband in such a work, offered his help, which was gladly accepted ; and the gray-headed old man, bent

with age, and the delicate young girl were more frequently seen together than apart. The labour thus commenced had no immediate results that could be worth mentioning here:—it is enough to say that the labourers continued to work on. Avice continued to live in her two separate worlds, and found no full life in either; and as she marched towards womanhood, and the shadows deepened on her fair, pale face, her influence over those she wished to influence was strengthened daily; for so much seriousness in one so young inspired all about her with respect and awe. Separated as she was from the past, as though the past had never been, it was not until many years had gone by that she resigned all hope of ever hearing from her sister. Edward Thorpe, to whom Avice had communicated the fact of having written to this sole surviving relation, informing her of her marriage, fully expected on his part, after what he had heard of Clementina from Mrs. Ritson, that she would never reply to the letter. He even hoped it might be so; and his hope was certainly more likely to be realised than her own. The one thing certain was, that Avice's lot was cast amongst the Burham crags, and that for good or evil she must abide by it.

CHAPTER II.

ON a certain day, eighteen years after the sad and solemn wedding that had taken place in the little church of St. John's Wood, and in which Edward Thorpe and Avice Desborough, were the chief actors, two individuals, both men of remarkable appearance, met each other accidentally in the midst of a great crowd in Fleet Street, and, after conferring for a few moments, walked on together. The elder of the two did not look nearly his age, which was sixty. His figure, tall and stalwart; his countenance, strong-featured, massive, and unwrinkled; his head, unusually large and erect, seemed to bid defiance to time. His companion, on the contrary, looked older than he was; for he was only twenty-eight, and his brown hair was already turning grey; and he was unnaturally thin, so that his cheeks were sunken; and his slight figure was characterised by a feeble stoop. It was about four o'clock in

the afternoon of a glowing July day, and the hot sun was rendered more oppressive by the close, crowded streets. Pursuing their course in a northerly direction, these two at length paused before the door of a house in Burton Crescent, at which they knocked and gained admittance. The maid-servant who opened the door, and who seemed to know the visitors well, said, in answer to their inquiries, that Mr. Moore was not at home, but that Miss Catherine was in the drawing-room.

"Then go on with your own work, Ellen, and leave us to manage for ourselves; only mind and keep the kettle boiling," said the younger of the two gentlemen. "What a many jolly nights we and others have passed in this room," he continued, pushing back the half open door of the parlour, in which a good fire was blazing. "In my poor aunt's life-time, I used to think there was not such a happy house as this in broad England; but since her death, it has, to me, been filled with shadows—the shadows 'lying everywhere where she used to be. If I had died two years ago, I should not have been haunted by these shadows."

"Poor Mary!" sighed the elder stretching his huge length upon a sofa. Nothing

further passed between the two, and the younger mounted the stairs, and entered the drawing-room.

"Catherine, cousin Catherine," he exclaimed, "where are you? Oh, I see;" and he pushed open the door of the back drawing-room, and beheld the person he was in search of, standing before an easel, on which lay a bold crayon drawing, a study from one of the great masters.

"I knew that it was you, Rupert," said Catherine Moore; "I recognised your knock; and I also recognised the step of Mr. Fraser: there is no mistaking either."

"I wonder what there is peculiar about my knock," said Rupert Lee. "As to Fraser's elephantine step, that might be distinguished anywhere. Well, here we are, both of us; and I'll tell you how it has happened. I met Fraser in Fleet Street, half an hour ago, and he said he was about to attend a lecture, to be delivered by a friend of his, and asked me to accompany him. I, having nothing better to do, promised that I would; but, as there were some hours to spare before the lecture commences, at eight o'clock, I suggested that we should come here for a cup of tea. You know what a fellow I am for tea. Where is my uncle?"

"When he went out this morning, he told me not to expect him home until late," said Catherine. "I will order tea as soon as you like. What is the time now?"

"Just five o'clock," said Rupert, glancing at his watch. "It seems almost too bad, Catherine, that your studies should be almost constantly interrupted by myself and others as they are."

"I wish you would take these interruptions into account when you are inclined to be so severely critical on my performances as you are sometimes," said Catherine. "Pray don't consider them just now, or you will mar everything."

"The tea, and so forth: that's true. If you find me a severe critic sometimes, it is because I wish you to excel, being conscious of the power that is in you. I see no reason why you should not become the greatest female artist that this country has produced. I have been sorry to see that, since my aunt's death, you have scarcely attended to your drawing at all. You know how much it has been my wish that you should go on and excel, as, with the necessary severe study, I knew you could and would."

"I know all this, and also what great pains you have bestowed upon me," said Catherine.

"Indeed, Rupert, I am not ungrateful. * But consider what demands have been made upon my time since my mother's death. What is your remedy for this?"

"I have frequently told your father that it would be better for him to engage a housekeeper than allow your time to be wasted in attending to household drudgery. Leave that kind of work to the women who are fit for nothing else."

"To such women as my mother, for instance. Oh, Rupert, for shame! She, knowing nothing of art, except that she was well able to appreciate whatever in it was beautiful and excellent, was one of the most truly great and noble women that I ever heard or read of. Her life, passed in active goodness; her death, full of peace, and brightened by the high faith that had regulated her life, were known to you: but much more was revealed to me. Amongst those who come here—my father's friends; renowned men some of them, all what is called clever men—I never met with one so entirely free from the besetting weaknesses that, where they exist, will become apparent at one time or another; so uniformly strong for the battle of life, as my mother was."

She had spoken earnestly, more earnestly than was usual with her, for Catherine Moore was

habitually quiet and sedate in manner and speech ; and now, seeing a smile steal over the face of her cousin, her own flushed for an instant, and she raised her head proudly—she *could* raise it proudly when she liked—and said further :

“ You are, doubtless, amused at my presumption in supposing that I have so far made acquaintance with the characters of men distinguished in their several ways, as to have discovered their weaknesses ; but remember that we women, who are required to look on and admire at a humble distance the superiority in many ways to which we never attain, do not look on idly, or admire blindly, but make good use of the quick perception of character with which God has endowed us, and call to our aid the judgment in which, as reasoning creatures, we are not deficient. What appears to me to be weaknesses in great minds may not strike you in the same light. The so-called sublime despair in which James Fraser and others indulge, and which they foster in one another, is not strength, as its frequent results of madness and misery always prove. I call this weakness, in comparison with that happy hope and faith in my mother, which rendered her strong for every purpose, in life and death.”

"You are quite right there," said Rupert Lee, hastily; "quite right, Catherine. God forbid that the sublime despair should ever touch you, or any woman living. I had no idea that you had looked into it so closely."

"How could I help doing that?" asked Catherine. "I sit at the head of my father's table, and his guests converse freely before me. When my mother was on her death-bed, she foresaw that this would be, and she warned me. Then I understood from her, what I had partly learned for myself already, that my father had long been too much under the influence of Mr. Fraser. This knowledge was one of the shadows that always lay on my mother's life. You cannot understand as I do, how tenderly and delicately, so that he could scarcely discover her aim, she tried to counteract this influence. The beautiful example of her whole life was a great stay to him. Almost her last words to me were a charge respecting him—a request that, as I valued her blessing, I would attend to and watch over my father as she had done, so that he might not too greatly miss her. You know how much he drooped when she died. I can never supply her place to him; but, with such strength as God has given me, I purpose to fulfil her last

wishes—to keep at my father's side so long as he lives. So, dear Rupert," she continued, laying her hand on his arm gently, "do not again speak to him about a housekeeper, as I cannot resign my post to any one; and allow me to look upon any more ambitious scheme for myself as a secondary matter for the present."

Tears sprung to the eyes of Rupert Lee as she spoke. He had loved his aunt, his mother's sister, very dearly; he loved his cousin. Raising her hand to his lips he kissed it tenderly and respectfully.

"You are a dear, good girl, Catherine," he said; "you always were. God forbid that I should oppose you in anything that it seems right to you to do. I confess myself to be weak in presence of that strength of yours. So now we'll have tea, Catherine; and you shall preside at the table like the household goddess you are. And humbled as I feel just now, I am constrained to confess, that much as I have advocated the introduction here of that said housekeeper, I had a lurking idea that I should never be able to patronise or even tolerate her on my own account. Certainly it is lucky for her, whoever she might have been; and lucky for me, that things are to remain as they are."

Catherine laughed as she put away her drawing-utensils and promised to follow him down stairs directly. She was a stately, really beautiful girl, this first and sole surviving child of Charles Moore ; possessing one of those perfectly classic forms and faces, whose general characteristic is great repose, so that they usually win admiration as a piece of statuary might win it ; putting out of sight, as no other forms or faces do, the idea of flesh and blood. Catherine's face was perfect in its Grecian outline and contour ; but it was wanting in the sparkling vivacity, the glow and life that make many a homelier face more attractive to look upon. Only a few might search into the depths lying under that quiet exterior ; but those who thus knew, would love Catherine Moore for ever. First ordering tea, Catherine entered the parlour, and began to converse freely and cheerfully with her two guests as it was her wont to do. Whilst they were thus engaged a low knock was heard at the outer door, so low as scarcely to be distinguished by the three persons assembled in the parlour. Catherine evidently paused and listened ; but the conversation went on until the knock was repeated, and then she rose from her seat.

" That knock will never be heard below," she

said ; " if you will excuse me for a few minutes I will go to the door myself."

" Why not ring for one of the servants ?" said Rupert Lee.

" Because," said Catherine, who had got to the parlour door, " I think I know that knock ; I believe it is a very old friend of mine ;" and Catherine vanished.

Shortly afterwards when the tea was brought in, Catherine appeared with it.

" Rupert," she said, " I must beg of you to act as host to-day. I have seen you make tea for yourself in that old study of yours, and I know you will not be at a loss. Mr. Fraser, you will excuse me I am sure, when you understand the occasion. I am becoming learned in knocks. When I opened the street door just now, I found the person I expected to see ; it was Nurse Rae, Rupert. She is an inmate of the workhouse, Mr. Fraser, and this is one of her days out, and she must be back by six o'clock. She says that she wants to ask my advice about some very serious matter. She closed my mother's eyes and dear Charles's, and I cannot neglect her. If you want anything more, Rupert, Ellen will attend to you."

" Why not ask Nurse Rae in here ?" said Ru-

pert. "I dare say she would like a cup of tea ; and I should like above all things to hear what she has to say. Do oblige me, Catherine."

"And don't leave me to suppose that I stand in the way of her coming in here," said James Fraser. "Do me the justice to believe, Catherine, that I can sympathise with this poor old soul, who after a hard life is ending her days in a workhouse."

For an instant Catherine looked undecided. "I cannot order Nurse Rae to come up here," she said ; "I will explain the matter to her, and if she has no objection it is all well. Understand, both of you, that she has suffered very greatly. You have both seen her in former times, and you will see now that she is very near her journey's end."

Catherine disappeared, and very shortly afterwards entered the room again, leading by the arm a very aged-looking woman, attired in the workhouse dress. Many old women of eighty look younger than did Nurse Rae at sixty-nine. Besides being so wrinkled, and battered, and worn and bent, there was a humbled, abject look about Nurse Rae that was painful to witness. She had been accustomed to feel a honest pride in her humble independence ; and

she had felt keenly the disgrace of being at last compelled to enter a workhouse. She had an idea that she was no longer fit for decent company. In common with all who have been brought low, she liked to speak of her better days; and she liked best such as had known her in those better days. Catherine Moore could do anything with her; and she readily followed Catherine to the presence of her two old acquaintances, Mr. Fraser and Mr. Lee.

Rupert had wheeled the sofa to the table, and he helped Catherine to place her upon it; and Rupert, taking the superintendence of the tea-table upon himself, handed her the first cup of tea. Both he and Mr. Fraser had cordially shaken hands with her when she entered.

"It's a pleasure to me," said Nurse Rae, in her quavering voice, "to see any I've been used to see in this dear house, where I spent so many happy hours in my best days. When the mistress was alive, nobody had a kinder welcome than I had; and it's the same now, I know. If the mistress could have known what I've come to—dear, dear; it would have troubled her kind heart!"

Waiting upon her, soothing her, speaking to her many kind words, the tea was got over; and

then Nurse Rae, her time being short, commenced speaking of the trouble that had induced her to come and consult Catherine. It was a new trouble—a trouble only of yesterday ; she spoke of it only as “ a trouble.”

“ It is a long history before I can make you understand all the rights of it,” she said, rubbing together her trembling hands. “ You see, Miss Catherine, when you was born I was charring at the Temple, and a good place I found it ; not in respect of money I don’t mean, though many made me handsome presents, but because all the gentlemen was kind to me, especially one that I shall never forget ; one that died on the very day you was born—dear, sweet, young gentleman, I think I see him now !”

“ I remember all that story,” said Catherine, “ you told it to us years ago ;—how he brought his young sister to his chambers one morning ; and took her all about the Temple and the Temple church ;—how they dined together, he having previously made unusual preparations ; how he was suddenly taken ill while thinking of taking his sister to see some new sight—how he died, leaving her with her heart almost broken. I have wept more than once over that story, Nurse Rae.”

"To be sure I told you all about it," said Nurse Rae, whose memory began to fail her a little. "I told you too, I dare say, all about Mr. Osborne, the young gentleman's friend; him that was so kind—Oh, so kind!"

"Yes, all about Mr. Osborne, who was so kind," said Catherine. "When I was quite a child I loved that Mr. Osborne, because of what you said of him. Go on, Nurse Rae."

"I was took ill myself soon after the young gentleman died," continued Nurse Rae. "I went home and lay ill a many weeks; and then I was took to the infirmary and was ill a many months there; and when I went home I was still ailing, and my two children, John and Sarah Ann kept me. They was always good children, John and Sarah Ann. Before I was quite strong again, my sister died, her that nursed your mother when you was born, Miss Catherine; and it come into my head, and into my children's heads, that I'd best turn nurse myself, and seek out her connection, because she'd always done well, and I wasn't strong enough to take again to my old work at the Temple. So I took to going out nursing, and I came here amongst other places; and many's the glad and sorrowful days I've passed in this

house. I was here when little Katy was born, and Alice, and when they both died ; and when Charley was born, and when *he* died—the dear, noble little fellow, eleven years old ; and when the mistress died—that was worst of all. ‘This is not what I came to speak about,’ continued Nurse Rae, again rubbing together her trembling hands, “but the old thoughts will cling to one. Before your Charley was born, my John married and went out to Australia. He was loth to go, and that was a bad sign for him ; but he didn’t see any good he could do here, so he went, saying he would send for me directly he raised money enough, and I promised I would follow him. Sarah Ann was married already to a bad, drunken husband that used her ill. I had to half keep Sarah Ann and her children many a year.

“Well, first there came news from Australia that John had arrived safe and was hoping to do well ; and then there came news that he was lying ill and that his wife was in poverty and didn’t know what to do. It was your good kind father, Miss Catherine, as raised the subscription for me when in my distracted state I said I would go out to John at once. Then it was thought best that the money should be sent

to his wife, and it was sent; and then came the news that John was dead."

The trembling hands were clasped together more tightly, and the old woman bowed her head over them and wept. Catherine drew closer to her, and placed her arms round her neck. "These are sad memories, dear Nurse," she said; "try to go on."

"This isn't the trouble I came to speak about," resumed Nurse Rae, "but I must tell all as I told it only yesterday to Mr. Osborne, or I shall not be able to make you understand the rights of it all."

"Mr. Osborne!" exclaimed Catherine, "do you mean the Mr. Osborne of that old story?—have you seen him?"

"Yes, yes, it was him sure enough as came to me yesterday. What was I saying about John?—John died. He didn't leave any children, and I lost sight of his widow. I lost sight of Sarah Ann, for her husband took her to a distant part of the country, and I heard nothing for years till I heard she was dead, and that her husband and son—they'd only one child—was gone to America. These troubles helped to break me up, and I broke up two years back. Then I was obliged to go into the poor house.

I was a poor lone woman, with nobody belonging to me to disgrace; but I felt the disgrace myself—it came very hard to me.” Nurse Rae again bowed her head in her deep humility.

“Human pride has always appeared to me to be stronger than human love,” said James Fraser. “Look at its working even here. Love may change; it may even be forgotten altogether; but pride always clings. It is a sorry contemplation when we consider that one man’s pride is nearly always ridiculous or unaccountable to another.”

James Fraser did not address himself particularly to any one. As he thus spoke he stood leaning his huge frame against the mantelpiece, his arms folded over his broad chest. Catherine’s steady eye glanced from him to Nurse Rae, and back again.

“Love and pride always go together, when both are noble in the sight of God and man,” she said. “They are never separated. We do not usually speak of a beloved object as being very dear to ourselves, so dear as to be necessary to our very existence; we speak rather of the noble qualities, the high nature, the goodness, that has won our devotion. Annihilate the love, and the

pride is ended; bring the love to shame, and the pride is mute. I speak only of that noblest pride which always springs out of love. The true language of love, as it is heard by the world, is always proud rather than fond. We are proud in ourselves because we wish to be worthy of those we love, whether the object loved be living or dead. You have not yet told us all, dear Nurse."

"I was just coming to speak of my new trouble," said Nurse Rae, who only dimly comprehended what had been said. "An old friend of mine is dying in one of the infirmary wards, and she said she should like me to be with her, and I offered to nurse her, and was allowed to go, because just now there is a deal of sickness, and the regular nurses are overworked. Only yesterday a gentleman came, wanting to see this old friend of mine. I was told that he was a lawyer, and wanted to hear something that she could tell him. He sat a long time taking down in writing what she said. He was a middle-aged gentleman, a fine-looking, personable man, and he had a young gentleman with him. I saw him turn and look at me a many times, but I didn't recollect him at all. At last he asked me my name, and when I told him, he jumped

out of his chair and said he must have a long talk with me. Then he asked if I hadn't been at the Temple many years ago—nearly twenty years ago;—and if I didn't remember young Mr. Desborough. I said I remembered him sure enough; I was with him when he died, and closed his eyes, and helped to streak him for his coffin. 'Don't you remember Mr. Osborne?' he said; and then sure enough I knew that *he* was Mr. Osborne, and told him so. Then he wanted to know all that had happened to me since, and I told him just what I've told you. I never saw a man so put about as he was. He said nothing that had happened ought to have happened; and I should have gone to him in my first trouble. I told him I hadn't known him well enough for that, and then he said it was all his own fault, and he should never forgive himself. He said his own troubles had made him neglect me, but he'd never forget me, and he'd always intended to do something for me for his friend's sake. Such love as he had for that poor young gentleman, Mr. Desborough! He said he'd enquired about me after I was gone, but nobody could tell him where I was. 'It's late in the day to offer you help now,' he said, 'but I *must* help you; you must let me

take you out of this place :’ them words put me all in a heap :—this is my present trouble, Miss Catherine. As I said to him, I’m a lone woman in the world now ; if I go out of the house I can only go amongst strangers ; and I can’t begin any new life in the world that I should have any heart in. My heart is mostly with them that’s gone. I’m not strong enough to do much for myself or anybody else. Then, once in the workhouse, it’s always in the workhouse ; and I might as well die where I am. I didn’t say all this to him at once : everything I said seemed to hurt him. I asked him about the dear young lady, Mr. Desborough’s sister, and that seemed to hurt him too. ‘ She’s gone,’ he said, ‘ gone from me as everything has gone from you.’ He told me not to speak of her ; so I suppose she’s dead. Poor young creature ! when I looked at her sweet, pale face, I’d a sort of notion that she wasn’t for this world. Well, as we talked together, I said I shouldn’t like to do anything till I’d spoke to my truest friends, Miss Catherine and her father ; and he asked who Catherine was, and I told him all about you, and your being born on the very day that Mr. Desborough died. That seemed to move him strangely. I said what an angel

you'd been to me, as your mother was before you; and anything you saw right for me to do, I should see right to do it. So he said, 'Pray go to Miss Catherine, and let me know what she says.' He told me, too, that if he took charge of me I should have nothing to do and be well attended to. I don't like to seem ungrateful; but it's hard to be called upon to think for oneself when there's nobody belonging to one left to think for. It's only a trouble to me all through, Miss Catherine; and I want you to tell me what I'd best do."

"What do you say to the love and the pride here?" asked Catherine, turning to Mr. Fraser. "And this Mr. Osborne, whom I learned to love when I was quite a child, what do you say to him? For my part, loving him now more than ever, I begin to feel very proud for him indeed. I honour him for that steadfast faith that still links him with the dead; for that readiness in him to acknowledge his omissions—and to atone for them. But, dear nurse, you are putting a rather hard task upon me: I scarcely know how to advise you, for in your circumstances I believe I should feel just as you do. I can only say this—"

"Osborne," said Rupert Lee, interrupting

her, "I wonder if this is Osborne the great barrister? He is an eccentric man, I understand, and lives chiefly in the Temple. Does your Mr. Osborne live in the Temple, Mrs. Rae?"

"Yes, he does sir; and in the very chambers that belonged to Mr. Desborough: so he told me himself."

"Then it is the same. Why he is one of the wealthiest men in England;—not merely because his practice is large, but because he was a great landed proprietor to begin with. He belongs to a good family, and has a place somewhere down in Yorkshire;—Staunton Court, I think it is called. You know all about it, I dare say, Mrs. Rae?"

"No I don't, sir," said Nurse Rae; "I only know that he is called Mr. Osborne; I never heard much about him, except that he was a very kind gentleman—when he was young, I mean."

"Osborne—Staunton Court—Yorkshire," muttered James Fraser, putting his hand to his ponderous head;—"all this sounds familiar to me. To be sure;—I see it now. Yes; this Mr. Osborne is a wealthy man. I never understood before that Osborne of Staunton Court and Osborne the barrister were the same. What was it you were about to say, Catherine?"

“I was just about to say to nurse, that she has not yet so far done with the world, or the world with her, that it is quite out of her power to afford and to receive gratification. Consider this, Nurse Rae : if I, who love and respect you very much ; if my father, who has always cordially wished you well, could see you better situated than you are now, it would give us pleasure. I visit you where you are ; I do what little I can for you, which amounts to nothing ; and these visits always sadden me, and you also. Long ago, if we could have done it, we should have altered your situation ; and now, if you allow Mr. Osborne to do for you what he wishes to do, we shall feel that what we wished to do is accomplished. It would afford me great pleasure to see you better attended to and cared for than you can be where you are. You see, I am somewhat selfish in my advice ; I wish you to please me if not yourself.”

“What pleases you will be sure to please me,” said Nurse Rae. “It is very good of you to say what you have said. I could never feel quite alone in the world so long as you lived, and your father. You’ve always had a way of making most things as pleasant as they could be ; and I’m obliged to you now for making this pleasant

to me that was only a trouble before I saw you. So I'll tell Mr. Osborne I'll accept his goodness thankfully; and now I think it's time I was gone. It'll be near six, Mr. Lee?"

"Just a quarter to," said he, looking at his watch. "It won't take more than a quarter of an hour to walk to St. Pancras. So now, nurse, get on your bonnet and cloak, and I'll walk with you. It won't be the first time that you and I have jogged through the streets together, old lady, eh?"

"Not by many a time, sir," said Nurse Rae, as Catherine was equipping her in her bonnet and cloak. "When you was quite a little boy you would see Nurse Rae home through frost and snow, and however late it might be. It's been a great stay to me, the kindness I've always met with in this house. I pray God's blessing to rest on it, as I'm sure it will."

For some time after Nurse Rae and Mr. Lee had taken their departure, James Fraser retained his position, neither speaking nor moving, but occasionally looking down over his folded arms at Catherine, who had produced a work-basket and was busily sewing. It had not frequently happened to Catherine to be left alone with Mr. Fraser, and she was not in the habit of ad-

dressing him voluntarily. She did not personally stand in any awe of him ; for the greatest of men are not very formidable to those who are in the habit of seeing them daily ; neither did she shrink from him because of his peculiar opinions against which she had been warned by her mother ; nor absolutely dislike him because of the influence over her father that had always been a sorrow to that mother. Singularly strong in mind, and straightforward in character, she had already—brought into contact with them of necessity in her father's house—withstood the shock of many daring opinions on matters of vital import, while quietly receiving and cherishing in her own heart and spirit the principles and beliefs that gave her, girl as she was, an individuality apart from that of others. In this school she had learned to become thoughtful, earnest, liberal, hopeful. Never dreaming of attempting to reform what appeared wrong to her ; never visiting the wrong upon any individual head, but watching its rank and rapid growths with sorrowing eyes, and pitying those who became entangled by them ; always trusting that God in His own time would make all things right ; always striving to keep right in herself, Catherine stood apart from others,

isolated yet strong, because her sympathies were strong for all around her. Respecting James Fraser as her father's almost life-long friend; respecting him as a man of undoubted talent and great learning; she had yet never been able to put much heart into her liking for him, and the respect she felt was not of a profound kind. His own usual manner with women and children was not attractive, not gracious—when he did not overlook them altogether, he too evidently condescended to them. It was a mistake in him to condescend to Catherine, because there was nothing in him that had any genuine power over her; and in such cases condescension always borders on the ridiculous. James Fraser, with many others, might be pardoned for overlooking and underrating Catherine, who heard much, and herself seldom spoke. On this occasion, while looking down upon her in an idle mood, it occurred to him for the first time that she was becoming womanly in look and manner as well as in years. In speech too; for she had never before said so much in his presence as she had said during the last hour. For the first time, too, he discovered that she was really beautiful. Her graceful and stately bearing began to impress him as one manifestation of

human power. Even her habitual silence, after learning that she *could* speak, inclined him to think favourably of her. The result of his meditations of this kind was, that he muttered to himself—"I dare say Catherine is not a fool." Presently he addressed her. .

"You seem to be in a particularly thoughtful mood to-night, Catherine," he said. "There is even an expression of pain on your face. Something that Nurse Rae said has impressed you to the extent of making you sad."

"It did strike me as something sorrowful, and not very encouraging," she said, "that nurse should magnify as she did—as she always does, the little kindness she has received in this house. There is, to me, something degrading in the idea—I should say in the reality of a fellow-mortal attaching so much importance to a little human sympathy received by the way. It is particularly sad in the case of a person so old as Nurse Rae."

"You object then, to excess of gratitude. If you live many years longer, your ideas on that subject may change. The world is filled with complaints of an opposite kind."

"I am quite aware of that." I object to the excess of gratitude as something too abject ;

entire want of it is an error the other way. Both seem to prove that the kindness so acknowledged is a singularity, and is to be dealt with only as such by each in his peculiar way. If acts of kindness, if assurances of sympathy, were more common amongst individuals and between classes; if the right to expect and receive help was more universally recognised, benefits received would have a chance of being universally acknowledged in a natural and pleasant way. As matters stand now, pride is always wounded and roused, or humility is enforced. I cannot help shrinking from both alike. We are most of us more ready to give help than to ask it. There is something degrading attached to the idea. Even in cases where only sympathy is needed, it is best to keep the trouble to oneself. Those who crave for sympathy are accounted weak, as those who crave for help of another kind are accounted beggars."

"And you would remedy all this if you could," said James Fraser, looking down upon her with his sad, pitying smile. "You would become a female reformer; you would attempt to do for humanity what the gods themselves cannot or will not do?"

"The gods?" said Catherine, looking up in his face. "Well, even your heathen gods taught mankind the great truth, that they must help themselves and one another, if they expected to thrive. Immediate divine help in the everyday matters that God has left in men's hands, first making those hands capable of the work, is not to be expected. How many amongst us accuse God's providence, when we should rather accuse ourselves, or those on whom we had a right to depend, and who have failed us at our need!"

"You think, then, Catherine, that God leaves us to ourselves, and that we perform our own work badly?"

"No; God never leaves us to ourselves; when we do what we know to be wrong, we are immediately made conscious of his presence. We perform our own work badly enough; chiefly, perhaps, because we are apt to forget that we shall finally be called upon to give an account of our doings."

"Well, I suppose it is a fact that every woman has her own notions respecting these matters," said James Fraser, still pityingly. "I think it would be better not to trouble yourself with speculations of this kind, Catherine: they

never amount to anything in the end. However, what you have said, shows goodness of heart. You will, doubtless, always be generous, and therefore you will always be imposed upon. Poor child ! poor child !”

Catherine was vexed with herself for having spoken as she had done. What folly it was in her to afford these glimpses of her inner life and belief to James Fraser, who, in return, could only annoy her with his compassion, or overwhelm her with his ridicule ! Thus upbraiding herself, she bent more sedulously over her work. Presently James Fraser again addressed her.

“ With your peculiar notions,” he said, “ it is no wonder that, ever since your childhood, you have been haunted by reminiscences of this Mr. Osborne. You heard, to begin with, that he was generously attached to his friend : now, cherishing that friend’s memory, he is inclined to be generous to a comparative stranger for his sake. As is the wont with all women, you bring your hero to the throne of your imagination, and, as a preliminary matter, invest him with shining garments, instead of summoning him to the bar of your judgment, and there stripping him of such pretentious array as he may already have assumed for himself. In a

mere money point of view, Mr. Osborne's liberality amounts to little. He is worth thousands; if he has no miserly propensities, his money must be a burden to him, for he is frugal and simple in his habits, and spends next to nothing upon himself."

"Do you then really object to one human being admiring and approving in another what seems to be good and great?" said Catherine, looking up in surprise. "When I first heard of Mr. Osborne's kindness to his friend, I did not learn that he was rich. Nurse Rae was not acquainted with that fact when she spoke just now. He had not paraded his riches before her eyes; he had not told her that, being rich, he had already more claims upon him than he could well attend to. I honour him the more for all that you tell me."

"You are inclined to be pertinacious, I see," said James Fraser. "Take a few more onward steps and you will be falling in love with this Mr. Osborne. Through the medium of Nurse Rae you may yourself be brought into personal contact with him. Now, I must solemnly warn you against entertaining any idea that you can ever be anything more to him than the merest stranger. The more of a stranger the better."

Catherine was a little astonished, a little shocked, a little amused. She laughed, however. It was not a legitimate laugh; it might have come under the category of laughs that are said to be on the wrong side of the mouth. There was to her something even painfully absurd in the idea of the grave, stern James Fraser thus admonishing her on the consequences of this very remotely-possible love affair. The feeling that was upon her would have left a weaker nature undecided whether to laugh or cry. Catherine laughed at once; but the next minute she was very grave.

"If I ever am brought into personal contact with Mr. Osborne," she said, "I will remember your warning. At present, allow me to feel that I am very safe."

"Catherine," said Mr. Fraser, very solemnly, "I was born long before your father; your father was born long before you saw the light. Together we had learned something of this hard world when you were yet a baby, lying in your mother's arms. Even before that time, before you were born, we two together became acquainted with the circumstances that now, coming back upon me with their full force, induce me to warn you against seeking to form a too

close intimacy with Mr. Osborne. You must understand that I have never heard anything detracting from Mr. Osborne's dignity as a true man ; on the contrary, I myself honour him as a man greatly. I know him personally as Osborne the barrister ; as Osborne of Staunton Court I knew him by report before you were born. I only learned to-night that the two were identical ; and I acknowledge that I now honour him more than ever. Still he is only a man ; he is a proud, prejudiced man ; and I would rather not be brought into too close contact with his pride or his prejudice. I would rather that those I love were not brought into close contact with either. When your father comes to know who this Mr. Osborne is who is interesting himself about Nurse Rae, he will feel as I do respecting yourself, if you say to him what you have said to me. Make light of the matter if you love him ; do not question him on anything that I have said, because such questioning can only be painful to him, and he will not be inclined to afford you any information. I appeal to your pride ;—I know that you are proud, because you affect humility. If this Mr. Osborne becomes acquainted with you, and learns who you are, he will treat you with contempt. He will

do this, never having heard your father's or mother's name, or having been brought into personal contact with either of them ; and because of prejudices that I for one do not blame in him, and would rather, as I said, have nothing to do with. You are not deficient in a certain kind of strength, and I shall expect to see you exercise it. Keep aloof from this great, strong, stern, rough man, whose utterances of whatever kind are powerful, and who is accustomed to sweep out of his path whatever is obnoxious to him, with a force that is not to be withstood."

Rupert Lee returned before Catherine could make any reply, if she had intended to make any reply, to this extraordinary speech. When the two gentlemen had taken leave, she sat down to think. Her pride had certainly been roused, and much indignant surprise, that if it had found a voice at the moment, would have been vented in some such way as this :

"What right have you, Sir, to sit in judgment on Mr. Osborne, and report of him in a way so offensive to myself?"

Her own aggrieved feelings inclined her to rank herself at once on the side of Mr. Osborne, who had most probably met with injustice at the hands of his acquaintance. All the facts re-

specting Mr. Osborne that had come to her knowledge were in his favour ; her admiration of him had been almost life-long ; and it was not in the power of a man, so comparatively indifferent to her as Mr. Fraser, to turn the tide by the power of his bare word. This was one of the truths respecting human nature that such a man as Mr. Fraser was likely to overlook. Catherine could only understand, from what he had said, that Mr. Osborne, being a proud man, a man of high birth, would not descend to her as an equal, if he chanced to meet her through the instrumentality of Nurse Rae. Catherine had never dreamed of becoming personally known to him by any means ; and even supposing such personal contact likely to happen, all that James Fraser had said came ungraciously from him to her, considering that, while he thus warned herself, he acknowledged that he was personally acquainted with him, and had found him worthy of all regard. All else that Mr. Fraser had said respecting him was attractive to her. This great, strong, stern, rough man, proud as a matter of course, and hiding in his rugged breast depths of almost womanly tenderness, was the very man to take her whole soul captive. James Fraser committed a mistake if he

supposed that he could lessen even Catherine's old interest in Mr. Osborne. So Catherine went to bed and dreamed of Mr. Osborne; and thought of him the first thing when she awoke; and never allowed that new and vivid image of him to pass out of her mind again.

CHAPTER III.

CHARLES MOORE'S old acquaintance, the managing clerk in the City, who had died more than ten years before the present date of our story, supplied to the former, during his lifetime, much information respecting Mr. John Rycroft and his doings, that occasioned our still-poetical, and sensitive, and romantically-honourable friend, to shrink more than ever from the thought of acknowledging his relationship to the ostensible master of Staunton Court. From this source he learned that personal hatred of John Rycroft, and detestation of his character altogether, and loathing of the vile means by which he had raised himself in his former master's favour; more than anything else, rendered young Mr. Osborne an exile from his tenantry, and prevented his ever seeking an interview with his sister. All this was kept by Charles Moore to himself; he did not communicate it even to

James Fraser; and his daughter, Catherine, grew up without having ever heard the name of John Rycroft. Charles Moore almost felt it to be a relief when his communicative City friend died. Thenceforward he heard no more of John Rycroft.

Some few of the facts respecting the Osborne family that were immediately made known to the world, reached the ears of James Fraser; but he was no gossip himself, neither did he mix with gossiping company; and his ponderous head was not fitted for the retention of small facts. Therefore, it had really never occurred to him that Osborne the barrister, whom he had frequently met at the chambers of a mutual friend in the Temple, was identical with the Mr. Osborne who might have been styled John Rycroft's master, if he had not voluntarily resigned such mastership as had originally remained in his hands. When the truth broke upon him all at once, he remembered much that made him consider it more than expedient that any relative of John Rycroft's should keep out of his way. Therefore, in the best manner he could think of, he had warned Catherine; and Catherine, as we have shown, besides resenting what he said, thought more of Mr. Osborne than ever.

That individual himself, a great man of his own making now, was seated alone in his apartment in the Temple about a month after Nurse Rae's visit to Burton Crescent. It was a bright September day, the sun shining as it had done on the day of Avice Desborough's visit to that very room, nineteen years before. And the sun was shining on the whole of Phillip's old furniture. Nothing had been changed; nothing taken away or moved out of its accustomed place; nothing added; nothing renovated. The old rickety furniture that Lady Otley had averred she saw Miss De Burgh select out of some lumber-room at Hampton Court, did not look much, if any, the worse for that additional nineteen years' wear. Change was visible in the present master of the room, and yet not much even in him. Looking his years, or more, as he had always done, he was still a fine-looking man, in the summer of life; his frame was more athletic and powerful; his black eyes more full of fire; and his strongly-marked features and swarthy complexion became his prime better than they had become his youth. On this occasion he was seated before Phillip's desk, impatiently tossing over several letters in search of a missing letter. Opening one received that

morning, he glanced at the date—September the thirteenth. It was evidently suggestive of something foreign to his present purpose, for he suspended his search for the missing letter, and suffered his eyes to wander round the room till they finally rested upon an easy chair that stood on the side of the fireplace opposite the door. He had just been reminded that a certain anniversary would occur three days hence. Falling into a reverie as he gazed on that easy chair, imagination vividly brought back a well-remembered scene. He saw Phillip lying there ; his head thrown back ; his handsome face flushed ; his eyes glittering with unwonted light, yet still retaining their old familiar look. He saw the young girl, Phillip's sister, as he saw her first, and as she had always haunted his memory ;—the slender figure ; the fair, pale face, with its clustering curls of dark hair ; the eyes lifted to his with a wistful, almost beseeching look ; the busy little hands. During this day-dream, the fire that sometimes literally blazed in his eyes became subdued ; the expression of the eyes softened, until there streamed from them one full revelation of tenderness, so deep and entire as to be impassioned. In that gaze might have been discovered some of the hidden

capacities of the great, warm, earnest heart beneath. Rousing himself at length with a start, murmuring to himself, "This will not do," he turned to the desk again, and again searched amongst his papers. One letter caught his eye, and he took it up, although he knew it was not the one he wanted. It was dated three weeks back, and had been sent by one of the officials of St. Pancras Workhouse. It contained the information that Nurse Rae was dead. She had been ripe for death; but perhaps her heart had given way suddenly in its ineffectual struggle to take hold of a new earthly life. Looking at this letter for an instant, and then tossing it away; muttering to himself, "How much more for which there is no remedy?" he resumed his search for the missing letter, which he finally found in a coat-pocket. The letter had been opened and read, and he now sat down to read it a second—perhaps a third or fourth time.

Since we last introduced him to the reader, Walter Osborne had entered earnestly into the battle of life. Any man equally proud and sensitive, but less powerfully organized, would have shrank from doing what he had done. Such pride as his, and so roused, could only express

itself energetically, and in a defiant way. He had been in danger of sinking altogether under a sense of degradation ; but if he had so sunk it would have been at once, and not by slow degrees. As he did not sink down and die, he rose up and lived. He dealt mercilessly with the sensitiveness that stood in his way ; punishing it as Cranmer punished his most unworthy hand ; for he, no less than Cranmer, was brought to the stake. What might not be consumed in his case, was brought under the subjection of an indomitable will. Thus determined to live, the consciousness of great power in him was too rampant to admit of his living idly. His mental and physical powers were nicely balanced, and both being great, he naturally turned to a pursuit that would afford scope for the development and manifestation of both. It was not, as the feeble coteries in Brook Street declared, a mere romantic impulse that led him to adopt the profession of his departed friend, and install himself in that friend's vacated chambers. The study of the Law suited his strong intellect ; and as a barrister he would be afforded opportunities of exercising the oratorical power which he possessed, and which no man could possess unconsciously. All the circumstances of his history

and mode of life enabled him to give himself up wholly to the pursuit he had chosen. No man in a greater degree possessed the power of putting away from him those he did not choose to associate with ; and before long, Lady Otley, and her feeble son, and the sleek Dean, and the accommodating Earl, kept the distance that, as a last resource, they began to call becoming in themselves. Thus unshackled and strong in himself, Walter Osborne made his own way until he became famous. Fame brought money ; and he now possessed more wealth of his own making than he knew what to do with. He had kept his word with his father, whether or not that was a magnanimous thing to do. He had never touched the Osborne property ; he had never interfered with Mr. Rycroft's doings of any kind. What had become of all the accumulations of all those years ? He neither knew nor cared ; it was enough for him to know that time itself had not been able to blot out the great disgrace that still hung over him and his.

The only communication he had ever had with Staunton Court since he last quitted it was by means of the yearly letter sent to his sister, inquiring respecting her health and comfort. To these letters Miss Osborne always replied

promptly, assuring her brother that she was quite well and happy, and especially grateful to him for having placed at her disposal the means of enabling her to gratify her tastes in the solitude in which she lived, and of being charitable to those who needed her help. These periodical letters, always meagre, barren, having the same look on the surface and nothing under it, might be all that Walter Osborne had any reason to expect from the sister who had never received more than the most ordinary education, and who had never been allowed the opportunity of forming any attachment to himself; but there was a miserable likeness in one to another, in the skeleton frame-work, never by any chance attempted to be filled up, that showed plainly enough there was no heart in them. One was the echo or copy of another. Were they written from memory or from dictation? It was true that his own letters were equally meagre; but this sister—this disgraced woman, with her wounded heart, and life altogether lost even in its spring—was it natural that not one stray sentence or word should ever escape her, indicative of the possible peace within her, or the possible war? Was she really so feeble in character—she, one of a race noted for strength of

character—as to be capable of nothing better than this? After nineteen years of bitter tribulation, Walter Osborne speculated in this way about his sister, and wearied himself with speculating, and then gave the matter up.

At length, and for the first time, he was called upon to arrest the now strong arm of John Rycroft. He received a letter (it was the letter we left him reading) from a certain Mr. Liddell, a small landed proprietor in the neighbourhood of Staunton Court, who, finding himself in Mr. Rycroft's grasp, had ineffectually struggled to get out of it, and who, as a last resource, applied to head quarters. His father had been an associate of the elder Mr. Osborne's in his most riotous time, and weaker than even he was in the weakest of ways, he made a complete wreck of his small estate, which he found it expedient to mortgage. Mr. Osborne was the mortgagee. The latter was quite capable of thus absorbing the whole substance of his ordinary companions, and glorying in the absorption like the veritable ogre he was. This elder Mr. Liddell survived Mr. Osborne many years, and contrived to pay the mortgage interest, as his son did after him. But the son did not thrive: he could not meet his engagements; and amongst the rest, he

could not satisfy Mr. Rycroft, who had chief hold on him. He prayed for time, and Mr. Rycroft would not give him the benefit of time ; and, as a last resource, George Liddell addressed himself to Walter Osborne.

Mr. Osborne recognised the analogy between this case and his own. Here was a son brought to extremity by the excesses of his father—not hopelessly so in the latter’s case, because of that lamentable but powerful sympathy to which he appealed. Determining at once what he should do with respect to the main object of the latter, Mr. Osborne yet lingered over its minor details, that not unintentionally, and not openly, and, therefore, very artfully, brought under his notice some of the doings at Staunton Court. Great state and show was kept up there after the Rycroft fashion ; but no amount of state or show could ever make the Rycrofts popular to the extent of putting out of mind the legitimate proprietors of the place and soil. There was, besides, an impropriety revolting to humanity in the fact of all this gaiety and display selecting for its theatre a spot already occupied by a mysterious horror ; a gaunt and abiding shadow, that was mighty to repel and dim all this tinsel and too pretentious substance.

Thus much and more was conveyed in a few sentences of the letter Mr. Osborne now held in his hands. And he could not doubt the integrity of the writer; because the latter avowed an attachment to Mr. Rycroft's daughter, an attachment that was reciprocated by her, but disapproved of by her parents, who looked higher than they would have done if they had continued to occupy their true place. The letter altogether was at once an appeal and an accusation. If Mr. Osborne had not deserted his post, it need not have been written. Mr. Osborne excused the writer on the score of what he might not comprehend. He determined to help him to the utmost. George Liddell should not suffer by the past, so far as he could remedy it, if he did not eventually marry John Rycroft's daughter. With the latter event Mr. Osborne had nothing to do; and he would certainly have respected his correspondent more, if through any other means he could as well have established his veracity.

Mr. Osborne had put the letter down, and was writing away at a rapid rate, when the door of his room was gently opened by a little old man, who entered, closing the door after him in the same gentle way. Except that he was very

old and little, and had evidently shrunk a good deal since the time when his very shabby clothes were new, supposing them to have been originally made for him, there was nothing remarkable about him. He took his hat off after entering the room, certainly not out of deference to Mr. Osborne, of whom he took no notice whatever. Drawing an old-fashioned mahogany stand, shaped at the top like a tea-board, close to the easy-chair, he next approached a cupboard on one side of the fire-place, and drew thence a decanter, half filled with sherry, a wine-glass, and a plate of biscuits. These he placed upon the stand, and then seated himself in the easy chair. His next movement was to spread a cotton handkerchief over his knees. He was evidently careful of his shabby clothes. Then he poured out a glass of sherry, drank half of it at a gulp, and without turning his head towards Mr. Osborne, observed,

“Nothing has been heard, I suppose?”

“Nothing;” was Mr. Osborne’s brief rejoinder. How did Mr. Osborne know who was in the room? His back was to the door; he had not once lifted his head, or ceased to write rapidly; seated where he was, and absorbed as he was, it was impossible for him to have obtained a glimpse

of the little old man up to this time. He seemed to be instinctively aware of his presence, or he might be familiar with his stealthy tread and manner of making himself at home. At all events, the two continued to busy themselves in their own way, quite irrespective of one another. Mr. Osborne wrote on rapidly, and the little old man helped himself to the sherry, and commenced munching a biscuit. The latter did everything in a leisurely, independent sort of way; he indulged all his peculiarities like one who felt himself free to do as he liked where he was. When he had finished the biscuit, he collected together the crumbs that had fallen on his cotton handkerchief and conveyed them to his mouth. Then he rested awhile; and presently he rose up and replaced the decanter, the wine glass, and the plate of biscuits in the cupboard. He moved the stand back to its accustomed corner, and then placed his hat upon his head; and then took a glance all round him as if to assure himself that he did not leave any visible traces of his presence behind. He glanced at everything except Mr. Osborne, who did not once glance at him. Then he approached the door, opened it, passed out, and closed it gently behind him.

All this time Mr. Osborne had continued to write rapidly. He had finished two or three letters and commenced writing another, when he heard a knock at his door which roused him thoroughly. Was he, like Catherine Moore, learned in knocks? or were his instincts so strong that he was usually aware what manner of person was about to approach him? Certainly this knock had produced a disagreeable effect; for as he started up, he knitted his dark brows, and clenched his teeth; and instead of calling to the visitor to come in, he approached the door in a sort of impatience, and opened it. The open door admitted Mr. Rycroft.

It was the first time, during nineteen years, that the two had met. Mr. Rycroft, now sixty years of age, looked as portly, and sleek, and comfortable as prosperity, and perhaps an easy conscience, could well make a man look. His manner was very abject and humble just now; but the manner sat uneasily upon him; he was evidently not used to it. He held his hat in both hands, and bowed his head over it very low.

“Well, sir,” said Mr. Osborne, sternly, after shutting the door, “what has occurred to make this visit necessary? Do you bring any news of my sister?”

"Only that she is quite well, sir, and very happy, and very grateful to you, sir, for the means—"

He seemed to be about to repeat, word for word, one of Miss Osborne's periodical letters, and, in a great horror, Mr. Osborne stopped him.

"It is nothing about her, then : *what* is it?"

Mr. Rycroft was possessed of great native effrontery : he had got over the shock of the first meeting, and already he was beginning to feel more confidence in himself.

"I thought it best, sir," he said, "to answer for myself personally in a matter that I know has been brought under your observation. You will understand, sir, that I allude to the case of George Liddell. George Liddell is the only man that has ever come forward to tax me with hard dealing : and George Liddell's character—"

"I have nothing to do with his character," said Mr. Osborne, sharply. "If his character is none of the best, he has the excuse of having had bad example placed before his eyes. I know what his father was in former years. A dissipated man, whose worst propensities were encouraged, whose weaknesses were played upon by others to the entire ruin of his character and estate. His son inherited the shame and the

ruin. You have a personal reason, Mr. Rycroft, for meditating further wrong against this *gentleman*."

Mr. Osborne emphasized the word—"gentleman," which Mr. Rycroft observed, and reddened. At Staunton Court, during many years past, he had been in the habit of considering *himself* a gentleman. In the presence of Walter Osborne, he was required to put off that character if he had ever entirely put it on. He pocketed the affront like the time-server he was, and replied meekly: "In striving to discharge well the great trust that you left in my hands now nearly nineteen years ago, I have had to encounter much animadversion and ill will; but no man of character has ever yet come forward to say I did him or any one wrong. In this case of Mr. Liddell, I overlooked a good deal before coming to extremity with him. He is not in a position to pay what is owing, and he never will be. He has not the capital necessary to work with; and besides, he is an idle, spiritless man. In other hands Limewood would be a fine property. You object to my speaking of Mr. Liddell's character, sir, (he had dropped the familiar "George Liddell,") but I must be allowed to say that he has been very ungrateful to me. Directly I

made known my intention to him he threatened to write to you. I knew that you would not like to be troubled with such matters. If I have had the ordering of everything in my own hands all these years, it has been in obedience to your own wish, sir."

"True, true," said Mr. Osborne.

"And as Mr. Liddell had written to you and said what he liked," continued Mr. Rycroft, greatly encouraged by this concession, "I thought you would in justice allow me to speak in my own defence. In the neighbourhood where we both live, Mr. Liddell's character and mine stand upon a very different footing. I can assure you, sir, that nobody there takes his part."

"Oh, I dare say not; I can understand all that very well," said Mr. Osborne, carelessly.

"Then you will see, sir, that he is malevolently inclined, as broken-down men generally are," continued Mr. Rycroft, feeling still more encouraged to speak all his mind. "He threatens me that he will write to you, with the intention of blackening my character as much as he can. I know he is a thorough scamp, sir, and a disgrace to our neighbourhood. If you will allow me to tell you all—" .

"Stop a minute," said Mr. Osborne, inter-

rupting him. "In the first place, he acts openly by telling you that he should write to me. He *has* written to me; and while complaining of some hard dealing, he does not give you any hard names. According to his account, he has only failed once in his payments; and he speaks hopefully of being able to meet his engagements in the future. All he asks from you or me is a little time. Cannot you allow him this time? It seems a small matter to concede to an evidently struggling man."

Mr. Osborne seemed to be so far indifferent as to be capable of being swayed, and Mr. Rycroft determined to put forth all his powers in order to sway him. Nothing short of his deadly hatred of George Liddell, who had never bowed down to him as others did; who had aspired to an alliance with him, poor as he was, who had always borne himself with an offensive independence, if not with some airs of superiority, in his presence, could have induced John Rycroft to come to London, with the intention of seeking an interview with Mr. Osborne. After exercising so much undisputed authority during so many years, it was a coming down to have to appeal to Mr. Osborne on any matter; and it was not in John Rycroft's nature to forgive the man

who had brought him to this ; even if there had been nothing else to forgive. Indeed, the whole matter assumed a more formidable aspect than this. If Mr. Osborne chose to interfere in this case, so far as to set aside Mr. Rycroft's judgment, he never having interfered with Mr. Rycroft's doings before, a great and hardly recoverable blow would be struck at the power hitherto firmly held in the latter's grasp. It was not only the reminding others of the great looming fact that Mr. Rycroft stood secondary in his place, and not first ; the principal thing to dread was, that Mr. Osborne, once roused out of his apathy, once brought to interfere at all, might go on interfering, might recognise such interference as a duty ; and so gradually assume all his hitherto abandoned rights ; and leave John Rycroft to find his own level. With all this before his eyes, John Rycroft had come forth to battle for himself. He battled after his own fashion, and with an inadequate knowledge and conception of the nature and the power to which he appealed.

"I know that Mr. Liddell has only failed in paying the interest money once," he said, "but I know that he must go on in the same way. It is a losing concern with him, sir, and he must

come to nothing—absolutely nothing. Then, in two years the principal becomes due. It is absurd to think of him paying the principal. It would really be benefiting him to get him out of the concern. He is only a disgraced man where he is, and he will never thrive where he is.”

“I am sorry to hear it,” said Mr. Osborne. “The Liddells are an old family ; only secondary, I believe, in that respect to the Osbornes in their own neighbourhood. Mr. Liddell, the father of this young man, was very dissipated, you say ?”

Mr. Rycroft had not said so ; but he very eagerly corroborated the fact. The elder Mr. Liddell had been very dissipated indeed ; so much so that reputable people had refused to associate with him.

“So that he was left wholly to the society of *disreputable* people,” said Mr. Osborne, quietly, “I remember that when I was a boy he was in the habit of frequenting Staunton Court. My father was not one of the reputable people who refused to associate with him.”

Mr. Rycroft scarcely knew how to take this. There was no denying the fact, so he acknowledged it.

“And this Mr. George Liddell was then not born,” continued Mr. Osborne. “Let us be charitable; we will not charge him with his father’s faults. I have kept you standing—allow me to offer you a chair. Mr. Rycroft, I confess,” continued Mr. Osborne, walking to his desk and seating himself before it, “that I have entered into this matter with some interest. I can readily sympathise with this young man, the last scion of an old race, who is cleaving to his ancient patrimony to the last as with a death-grasp. You, Mr. Rycroft, may not be able to enter into this feeling. But you are an old man now; you must be aware that the young have frequently a struggle to encounter. Every period of life has its privileges that are available for much usefulness. You possess much power in addition to natural advantages; and here, it seems to me, a glorious opportunity is offered you for exercising that power. At the best it is a sorry spirit that gives the young up as irreclaimable. I cannot help thinking that you with your established character and position, and with the great means at your disposal, might readily do everything that is needed in order to elevate this young man, and make him a more reputable member of society than his father was

before him. You see how I am inclined ; and I must say that I would rather not interfere if I can leave him in your hands with safety."

"You must consider, sir," said Mr. Rycroft, "that I have had opportunities of studying this young man, who comes to you expecting to be estimated according to his own estimate of himself. I know him thoroughly, and I have no hope of him. He is a nuisance to the whole community where he is now."

"I am, as you must be aware, in the habit of sifting evidence," said Mr. Osborne. "What do you say to Mr. Trevor, who is your near neighbour? How is his character estimated by you or others?"

"Mr. Trevor is a very respectable man," said Mr. Rycroft. "He is odd, and has very obstinate opinions of his own ; but he is quite respectable."

"You never heard any one say anything against him as a man of high moral character?"

"No, I cannot say that I ever did."

"I received a letter from Mr. Liddell, as you seem to know already," continued Mr. Osborne. "I have not yet replied to it : I was about to do so when you came in. I wrote to Mr. Trevor some days ago, making inquiries respecting Mr. Liddell, and Mr. Trevor's answer

to those inquiries is before me now. He has known Mr. Liddell from his childhood; he always allowed him to associate freely with his own children. He entertains a high opinion of Mr. Liddell's character as being manly and noble. He expresses it to be his opinion that if Mr. Liddell is allowed time he will retrieve his affairs by dint of his perseverance and industry, which have been rendered necessary by the improvidence of his predecessors. Mr. Trevor sympathises with this struggle in a young man. *I can sympathise with it. I should have been glad to find that you could sympathise with it. As you cannot do that; as, in fact, you can do nothing, you must consent to be put aside altogether. I take this matter into my own hands. And remember, sir, that no act of oppression must be perpetrated by you in my name. I have nothing further to say to you now, and you must not let me hear more from you. Good day."*

The dismissal was so peremptory that Mr. Rycroft could not withstand it. He shuffled for awhile, sitting there with his hat in his hands; but he wisely considered that having lost a little, it was as well not to run the risk of losing more. So he gathered himself up, and

walked to the door, and let himself out. Once outside, a great war took place in his small nature. He had been thwarted who was not accustomed to be thwarted; he had been commanded who was used to have his every will obeyed; he had been shorn of his dignity to whom such dignity as he possessed was more than life. He had put himself greatly out of the way to no purpose; he had been compelled to humble himself before Mr. Osborne, whom he despised. It was a necessity to him that he should indemnify himself in some way for all this. If a cat or a dog had come in his way he would have kicked it; if he had hired a cab he would have accused the cabman of insolence. For want of better opportunity he merely paraded a little of his own sometimes intolerable insolence before one of the waiters at Fenton's Hotel, and roused the man's temper, and complained of him to his master, who assured him that the offender should be dismissed. Being a little mollified after this performance, Mr. Rycroft sat down to read the paper.

Politics, news foreign and domestic, accidents and offences, births, marriages, and deaths—Mr. Rycroft glanced at them all. Something

in the latter item, death, struck him: it ran as follows:—

“On the 11th instant, at his residence in Burton Crescent, after only a few days’ illness, Charles Moore, Esq., late editor of the *Morning Intelligencer*. Highly talented; liberal in his opinions; urbane in his manners; generous, and steadfast in his friendships; his loss will be widely felt. He has left an only daughter to lament his untimely death. He was in his 44th year.”

“Charles Moore,” said Mr. Rycroft, rubbing his nose as he mused; “I wonder whether this is my nephew. He would be about that age now; and he took to literature in his young days, I know. He seems to have been well respected, and I dare say his daughter is provided for. I shouldn’t mind making myself known to her. I’ll think about it.”

As Mr. Rycroft intended to spend a week in London, he had time to think about it. That he thought about it at all, was referable to the fact of his relative never having troubled him during his lifetime. He had a sort of respect for the memory of Charles Moore, in consequence of this fact; for John Rycroft could not naturally take to his relations,

and would have shrunk with horror from any one of them that might have come forward to ask his help. Being left free in this case, he was conscious of some little curiosity and interest. Besides, in the present state of his feelings, he was not at all unwilling to parade his greatness and importance before some unaccustomed eye. He felt benevolently inclined to astonish, and dazzle, and abase Charles Moore's daughter. With these thoughts in his mind, and under the influence of these feelings, he made some inquiries, the result of which satisfied him as to the identity of his nephew. His next movement was to proceed to Burton Crescent, and knock loudly at the door of the now desolated house.

So loudly that Catherine was startled. Not one amongst the many callers during her father's lifetime had ever given a knock like that; and since his death his old friends had announced their approach in the quietest possible way. Catherine decided at once that it was an ostentatious knock—an unfeeling knock if the perpetrator understood how recently death had been in the house. As all her father's intimate friends had already called to see her, except two or three whose distress had been too overwhelming to

admit of their visiting the house or seeing herself just yet, Catherine wondered who this visitor could be. Grace Lee, who was with her, wondered who it could be. Grace was Rupert Lee's sister, some years older than he was, so old as to be looked upon even by herself as an old maid. The two were the sole survivors of their own family, and a beautiful affection subsisted between them. Grace was her brother's housekeeper, and she was proud of his genius as a painter. His works were admitted to the exhibitions of the Academy; he had won a name; but he was poor, and in every sense a struggling man.

Ellen, the servant girl, entered the room, and handed to Catherine a card on which was inscribed the name, "Mr. Rycroft."

"The gentleman wishes to see you," said Ellen. "He says you will know the name—he is a relation." Catherine knew that her grandmother's name had been Rycroft, but she was not aware that she had a relative of the name living. Grace Lee shared her surprise. On the whole, Catherine was pleased. It showed well in this relative, in spite of his disagreeable knock, that he had sought her out in this hour of her great trouble. She desired Ellen to show him up-stairs.

These two relatives who had so recently become aware of each other's existence for the first time, received mutually an impression one of the other before a word had been spoken. Mr. Rycroft was struck by the stately gracefulness that characterised his great-niece's figure and bearing; by the exceeding beauty of her countenance; and by the calmness with which she bore her evidently deep grief. Catherine, on the other hand, discerned something coarse and vulgar in her relative—he was certainly not a gentleman. Mr. Rycroft shook his niece's hand, and then seated himself on the sofa.

"You know who I am, of course," he said.
"You will have heard of me."

Catherine acknowledged that she did not know in what relationship she stood to Mr. Rycroft: she had never heard of him.

"That is strange," he said, feeling a little nettled. "Did you never learn that your father's mother had a brother?"

"I certainly never heard my father speak of such a relative," said Catherine. "Have you resided abroad, sir?—he might have supposed that you were dead."

"That was not likely," said Mr. Rycroft, who had already made himself as comfortable

as possible by placing his legs on the sofa. "Most probably, being aware of the great difference betwixt his station and mine, he had an idea that I should look down upon him. I dare say Charles Moore was proud in his own way. If he did entertain any idea of that kind, my being here to-day is a proof of his having been mistaken."

"My father was not in the habit of supposing it possible for any man to look down upon him," said Catherine, quietly, but with a flash in her eyes that Grace Lee saw and understood. "He was a noble man, to whom all who knew him looked up with respect."

"All that is true, I dare say ; in fact, I expect that it is," said Mr. Rycroft. "It would not do for me to acknowledge myself connected with any one on whom positive disgrace rested. My dear young lady, I speak advisedly. Your father was a literary man, and literary men respected him—perhaps some others. I don't disrespect literary men myself—they are useful in their way—that is, when they don't make much mischief, as is the case sometimes ; but merely as literary men they have not much standing ; and never will have in this great commercial country, where wealth must always

command especial honour. I did not make this state of things; I merely take it as I find it. My own position as a wealthy man, and a large landed proprietor, is necessarily a very high one. Well, and what was the matter with your father that he should die so early—quite in the prime of life? He wasn't dissipated, I hope. Many literary men are."

Excessive grief had greatly shaken Catherine's nerves, outwardly calm as she appeared, and unfitted her for such an interview as this with her relative seemed likely to prove. Indignant surprise prevented her making any reply to Mr. Rycroft's question; and Grace Lee spoke for her.

"My uncle was not by any means a dissipated man. His constitution was always delicate, and a few days before his death, he caught a severe cold that ended in inflammation. He died early as you say, Sir; too early for the many hearts that can never cease to deplore him."

Catherine, seated by the table, rested her elbow upon it, and her face upon her hand, and tears began to trickle through her fingers, in spite of her efforts to keep them back. She could not yet command her voice to say what she wished to say.

Mr. Rycroft turned and looked at Grace Lee.

"You're not a Moore, I think?" he said.

"No; my mother was Mrs. Moore's sister."

"Oh, indeed. You understand now, I suppose," he continued, turning to Catherine, "that your father was my nephew. Don't cry; crying never mended matters in this world. To be sure, in many cases of bereavement there is only too much need for crying. Literary men have, I believe, always been especially noted for their improvidence. I dare say my nephew kept a good deal of company, not considering whether he could afford it or not."

"My uncle was well known and estimated, and therefore he drew around him many congenial spirits," said Grace Lee, to whom Mr. Rycroft had addressed the concluding sentence of his speech.

"And, as a matter of course, he wasted a good deal of his substance on those congenial spirits. I am a man of the world, and understand these matters. Your congenial spirits of that kind always fail a man in extremity. If there is any pecuniary burden to be borne, it must fall wide of them. If my nephew died poor, as I suspect, what has his daughter to look to? That is the great question, and if I am to be of any use it must be answered."

The great question, as Mr. Rycroft called it, seemed to the young girl, and the young woman who had not been accustomed to meet with persons of his character, to be put in an offensive way. For divers reasons there is a good deal tolerated in this world that would look very ugly in print, and that yet never exceeds the bounds of what is popularly considered to be quite proper. Mr. Rycroft, a substantial man, if a coarse man, had only said what thousands would have said in his place, and what they would entirely approve. Grace Lee, however, was brought to a full stand. She remained silent, leaving Catherine to say for herself what she thought best. Catherine was sufficiently roused to dry her tears. Indignation for awhile mastered her grief. All that Mr. Rycroft had said respecting her father's tastes and habits was too true to be controverted; but besides never having dreamed that her father's wisdom in what he did, and his right to do it, could be so far called in question, she had a deep-seated conviction that whatever had been noblest and best in her father's character; his liberality of sentiment; his warmth of heart; his steady adherence to the law of doing as he would be done by; was something quite as incomprehensible to

Mr. Rycroft as the latter's peculiar views might have been to him, or were to herself. Certain enough it seemed to be, that her father's genial temper, and readiness to feel for and help others, had greatly stood in the way of his hoarding for any purpose; but Catherine's sympathies had always gone with him in whatever he did, the more inevitably because in all his personal habits Charles Moore had been a temperate man. So Catherine, rejoicing in the recollection of her father's kindliness and benevolence; recalling with pride the many memories that to her bore witness of his having lived as a true man amongst men; could only painfully but thoroughly repel Mr. Rycroft's harsh judgment; and reject his conclusions altogether; shrinking with especial distaste from his candid avowal that this sweeping condemnation had especial reference to the possible fact of herself being unprovided for.

"You, sir," she said, "knowing nothing of my father, venture to speak of him as those who knew him thoroughly would not and could not do. As I have told you, I know nothing of the relationship which you have voluntarily declared. I do not stand in any need of your help. I am surrounded by kind relatives and

friends, who sympathise with me fully. Just now I am scarcely fit for other society than that to which I have been accustomed."

Here was another rebuff for Mr. Rycroft, whose natural arrogance had been encouraged by the subserviency and adulation that usually attend prosperity. He was only irritated, however—not in the slightest degree abashed. His own estimate of human nature led him to make allowances. His great-niece could not possibly be made to understand how really important a personage he was from what little he could himself say on the subject. He had not brought in his hand—as he would have done if he could—Staunton Court, his servants and carriages, his troops of friends. The independence of spirit that she had exhibited made him feel more than ever desirous of parading these things before her eyes. Besides, he had been considering, during the last twenty minutes, that Catherine, with her really handsome face and person, her calm, stately manner, and evident superior breeding and intelligence, might be advantageously brought forward and acknowledged as an offshoot of the Rycroft family tree; her want of fortune being, in a great measure, compensated by the very distinguished look and bearing, that had struck

him at once as something creditable, and capable of being turned to profitable account. Of course, he felt sure that Catherine could be only slenderly provided for, at the best. It was quite true that, if he had found her plain and commonplace—if he had found her sickly, or in any way likely to be burdensome to him, and not a credit at all—he would, without the slightest compunction, have adopted measures to prevent her ever troubling him or his; but, as it was, he was inclined to be generous. He perfectly understood that, as a preliminary matter, he must contrive to render himself more agreeable; and with this end in view, he now so far travelled out of his way as to express some regret that he had not known and seen more of his nephew.

"The fact is," he said, "I lost sight of Charles when he was quite a boy. My own career has been a very stirring one; and when a man's hands are full, and his thoughts always occupied, he is apt to appear to be neglectful, without intending it. Your father was busy enough in his way, and without doubt he forgot me. I think we might cry quits on this score. I am a little free-spoken, I dare say; I've been accustomed to be that; and you must believe I mean well. I think I am the only relative you have on

the father's side ; in fact, I am your nearest relative : and, as such, I have some right to make myself useful. Oh, we must have you down in the country ; it will do you good, and your aunt and cousin will be delighted to see you, I'm sure. Let me see : Elizabeth will be about your age, I think, or perhaps a year or two younger ; Elizabeth is not quite eighteen. I was too busy to think of marrying till I was upwards of forty."

Continuing to converse in this strain, Mr. Rycroft contrived to make himself more agreeable, though it was out of his power to do away with that first disagreeable impression. If she had been allowed to like him to begin with, Catherine would have been inclined to like him very much, as the only relative on her father's side that she had ever known. As it was, she wished to be able to treat him with perfect respect, for that father's sake. But here, again, there was no real kinship between the two. It needed an effort on both sides, a complete constraint and disguise on one side, in order to maintain that outward semblance of friendliness. The two natures were essentially opposite, and would not bear bringing into close contact. Mr. Rycroft himself was aware of this, when he

dropped speaking of his wealth and making an exhibition of his importance ; but, unlike Catherine, Mr. Rycroft harboured a vindictive feeling : he could not forgive any who wounded his self-esteem. Rating human nature as he had been allowed to rate it by the many who had been only too ready to flock round him at Staunton Court, he contemplated enjoying a full revenge when the whole splendour of his position should suddenly burst upon Catherine. He meant to overwhelm her in that way ; to humble her high spirit so far as he was himself concerned, and yet to encourage it with respect to others. He was quite aware that, even amongst those who paid most court to him, there were many who behind his back indulged in animadversions on his own low origin, and who amused themselves with detecting certain vulgarities in his wife. This covert scandal and disrespect had been all along a great torture to him ; and now he was quite ready to catch at the idea of absorbing Catherine into himself—of exhibiting her as a specimen of what the Rycrofts had been, and were, and ought to be. “ After I have humbled her a little, so as to make her subservient to my purposes,” he said to himself, “ she shall be as proud as she likes ; the prouder the better.”

This was Mr. Rycroft's idea, and he determined to make the most of it.

And busying himself now in his niece's affairs, Mr. Rycroft was brought into close contact with James Fraser and Rupert Lee. The latter, in his simplicity, took to Mr. Rycroft greatly. He admired his bluff, thoroughly independent, English manner. He did not know how thoroughly English it could be in other respects. James Fraser looked on and said little. He did not think much. With all the past before his eyes, he did not see any objection to his friend's daughter accepting the protection of this rich uncle. He had no elevated thoughts respecting woman; he pitied her, and thought it was quite right that she should obtain as much as possible of this world's show. He had an idea that woman craved for little else; that, having obtained this, she would be satisfied. What he generally knew of women had supplied him with this idea. He was aware that, if this apparently good fortune had not befallen Charles Moore's daughter, she would have been left to struggle in the world for herself; for Charles Moore, who had intended to insure his life, had deferred the intention, as many others do, until it was too late; and now all that was left to her, except

her accomplishments, was about one hundred pounds. But Catherine, well educated, felt strong in herself. No fear on the score of obtaining a livelihood had ever crossed her mind. Mr. Rycroft, additionally irritated at Catherine's treatment of himself on learning how slender her means were, was yet compelled to defer to her independence of spirit. This poor, proud, self-reliant girl set him at war with himself: he did not like the idea of befriending her on her own terms; he could not afford to give her up.

James Fraser had yet one thought with respect to Catherine. "Down yonder," he muttered to himself, "she will learn all that it may be well for her to learn respecting Mr. Osborne. These women love their imaginary heroes best, and it is well for them to be disenchanted." Catherine, on her part, mentally bade adieu to all hope of seeing him in this world, while seated with her uncle in the coach that was conveying them both to Selby. She had not once thought of him since her father's death till now, when quitting London for an indefinite time, it might be for ever, all that had been interesting to her there, whatever had gained hold upon her heart or touched her feelings, came forcibly back upon her.

"Now, it is certain that we shall never meet," was the conclusion at which she came. She little knew that she was about to draw nigh to Mr. Osborne, instead of leaving him behind her.

CHAPTER IV.

WE will take a brief look at Avice in what had now become the past. At the age of twenty-five, she had made small physical progress towards womanhood. Her figure was as slight and shadowy, her face as wanly pale, as both had appeared on the night when Miss Susan Thorpe welcomed her to her home amongst the Burnham crags. Avice had made no great progress any way. With her, every day had been as one day, except that a certain amount of duty had been performed, a certain amount of pain suffered. She had not brought to her new life and work the whole heart and spirit that were in her. She could not have been persuaded by any that this partial occupation was sufficient to fill a lifetime; that this absence of satisfaction and enjoyment was an ordinary matter of which others complained in common with herself. Avice was too conscious that her lot was a peculiar one. Having no right to com-

plain ; feeling, on the contrary, constrained to acknowledge obligation and be thankful ; she yet could not, by means of any power left in her grasp, put away from her the sense of some great desolation ; the sound of some wailing cry that swept over this desolation continually ; so that the wail and the desolateness became more familiar to her than were any of the outer scenes and events of her life. The obstacles in her way had shaken Avice's faith in herself, and so had weakened her essentially.

After following her husband as far as she could well go with him, she had come to a full stop ; and there was no advancing or retreating thence. Still honouring him — never having loved him — she inevitably came in contact with opinions and peculiarities that roused in her resistance and repugnance, and roused them for no available purpose. Avice began to feel that she was a bond slave, and then she began to despise herself. In this self-abasement she still honoured her husband : he remained as he had always been, while she had fallen from her own high faith. It was a fearful thing to her to feel that she could not bare her whole soul before him, as he had bared his before her ; that if she did so declare herself, they two must inevitably

clash, and that fearfully. This impossibility of full and free communion desolated both lives, but only Avice's consciously ; because her perfect womanly submission, her partial spiritual sympathy, satisfied him entirely. The huge egotism that more than anything else distinguishes man from woman enabled him thus to satisfy himself. Avice was his wife. As such, she had no part in life beyond himself ; her very identity was swallowed up in his. If it had come to the trial, he would not have allowed her to think for herself, much less to act.

Edward Thorpe was weak here ; but he never knew that he had been compelled to pay the full penalty of his weakness.

When Avice had arrived at that age, twenty-five, she had, in conjunction with her husband, effected a great reformation amongst the miners, their wives and children. The former had been roused to a sense of their degraded state, the latter had been brought into an orderly condition. A reformation so rapid and entire, effected amongst such a people, attracted the attention of the neighbourhood, and the notice of all visitors was drawn to it. Visitors at the great house, Staunton Court, came to look at the school and the scholars, and to hear the whole

history of the great reform, which Mrs. Rycroft, as fine as fine dress could make her, was always ready to detail. Such visitors expressed high admiration of Mr. Rycroft, to whom whatever had been done was mainly attributable. For, had not the present school-house sprung up under the patronage of Mr. Rycroft? Did he not subscribe largely towards its support? What lay on the surface was readiest to be seen. Edward Thorpe, who had not worked for applause, and who was satisfied with his work, cared nothing for all this. He did not care to have his wife recognised for what she had done. He did not feel for her when she shrank from the condescending notice of the great people who sometimes came upon her unawares. She was a part of himself; she must act and feel as he acted and felt. This might have been very well if Avice had ever really become a part of himself; but that not being the case, much that was put upon her, as Edward Thorpe's wife, was a great burden to her. This life, into which she had hoped to have grown, was too meagre and barren to her; in it all her natural sympathies and tastes were chilled and repressed. She could not so readily put off the feelings in which she was educated, the habits of thought to which

she had been accustomed, as her husband required. She was hereditarily proud, in addition to being sensitive by nature; and her pride was continually being wounded, and her sensitiveness probed to the quick. Her vivid imagination and rich fancy—those immediate gifts of God—seemed to have been bestowed upon her in vain; for, in the narrow limits to which her husband wished to confine her, there was no room for their exercise.

Avice was certainly out of her place. If the reader can imagine an enthusiastic, high-born, young cavalier of the time of Charles the First, imaginative and poetical withal, and abounding in chivalrous feeling, being caught and caged by some stern plebeian Roundhead and Puritan, and made by him to go through certain performances for the benefit of lookers-on, he will have a good idea of what Avice felt with respect to some phases of her now ordinary life. She had partly grown up under Mr. Thorpe's eye, but she had made progress in her own accustomed way, rather than in his unaccustomed way; and the end of it all was, that she became strong to resist—not outwardly, and there was the mischief to herself. There was no one to whom Avice could turn for sympathy in an ordinary

way; and what she felt most deeply was not to be divulged. Her lot was cast. Besides, in that rebellion of her spirit, Avice did not accuse any one, least of all her husband. He was now, and ever had been, and ever would be, what he had declared himself to be at the first. Avice had not declared her whole self to him, because she could not; all that was in her remained to be developed after she had taken an irretrievable step. What she had grown to be was her own concern, with which no one might meddle; and she knew that she might have grown to be what she was under circumstances less favourable to herself than were those surrounding her at present.

In all this hard upward and onward life, Avice had, perhaps, more than anything missed the tenderness, the loving-kindness, and delicate attention that she had been accustomed to receive at the hands of her father and Phillip. Her own loving nature required some response; and in the absence of any demonstration of love, she lost the sense of entire protection. Edward Thorpe was a stern man, who recognized duties and performed them well, and who required nothing more in others than the performance of duties. He required nothing more from Avice. He was not the sort of man to concede anything

to her youth, her inexperience, to her previous initiation into a style and kind of life unfamiliar to himself. There was no considerateness or tenderness in his nature available for every-day use; but a large philanthropy, that required masses to work upon, and then worked well. In his great plans he lost sight of Avice, except as a partner in those plans; and thus lost sight of, Avice thought a little for herself.

When she had arrived at that age, twenty-five, she was no longer to be seen winding along the rugged paths that led from her home to the school-house, or crossing the dreary moor in company with her kind, infirm friend, the old clergyman, who for years past had been accustomed to seek the support of her slender arm. This good and valued old friend had lately been gathered to his fathers, declaring, before he went, that he had seen one good work in his day. Avice was now accompanied by another companion, a child nearly five years old, a little girl, whom she led tenderly by the hand. Avice's great delight, on the birth of this child, was first sobered and then changed to sadness, as time passed on. The little Lydia (Edward Thorpe had named her after his mother and sister) had been singularly quiet as an infant, and she was

now strangely apathetic as a child. There was nothing of the joyousness or the eager interest of childhood about her ; neither was she sullen or fretful, but merely quiet and indifferent, and incapable of being roused to express herself any way, as if a mortal numbness had seized upon all her faculties and deadened all her sensations. Yet, notwithstanding this callosity, so remarkable in a child, she was not intellectually deficient, but, on the contrary, ready to learn and to retain what she had learned. Edward Thorpe began to tax such powers as she possessed early. He intended to educate her as he would have educated a son. He excluded from his system whatever could appeal to the imagination. Milton's were the only poetical works admitted into his library, and these owed the distinction to Milton's political bias. These severe studies had already brought the father and child into close, and, as it seemed to Avice, congenial contact. To herself the whole inner life of the child seemed to be inaccessible. She repulsed a caress with coldness and evident dislike, and showed no aptitude for such teaching as Avice sometimes ventured to bestow upon her in the hope of touching some responsive chord. Herself highly imaginative, to begin with, and now

oppressed by much feeling, that had become morbid in her great solitude—seemingly threatened on all sides with being completely driven out of this too real world, like the alien she was in it, so that it was well for her that a land of dreams was open to her—Avice sometimes brooded over this later trouble, until she became overwhelmed by nervous and terrible fancies. It seemed as if the child had come for the sole purpose of avenging the wrong done to its father by her own want of love for him. Long before this the conviction had come to her that to such an union as hers with Edward Thorpe, destined to last a lifetime, she ought to have brought, as one indispensable dower, the deepest, strongest, truest love. She did not excuse herself now on the score of the difficulties swept out of her path long ago. She ought to have been strong enough to overcome them by means more honourable to herself. What was she but a lie and a cheat to her husband, who might not understand that his whole nature and habits chilled and oppressed her, so that, in the great gathering shadow of his authority and presence, the very life of her soul seemed withering away? If all this had not been an overwhelming truth, Avice's early sorrows, great as they were, would

long since have yielded to the influence of time, so as to have become at least softened ; but as it was, all the features of the past, by continually brooding over them, grew more dark and terrible to look upon. Avice felt that she ought to have died, while daily praying for strength to enable her to live. After losing her true and admiring friend, the old village pastor, Avice did not again acquire influence over any one. There was nothing in her nature to respond to or touch the natures about her. She had none of the power that Ritson, in her imbecility, seemed to possess of commanding respect and inspiring awe. It was a curious contemplation to Avice to observe what steady progress Ritson made in these respects, so that, in course of time, even the stiff, proud Miss Lydia and the self-opinionated Miss Martha gave great way to her. Poor Ritson made the most of her one remaining idea, and so she achieved success. Never going out, she was always happy to parade her stateliness before any chance visitor ; and as visitors, with the exception of the Misses Thorpe, were rare indeed, she bore upon the latter with the whole force of her boastful reminiscences. Much more cleverly than she could have done if she had tried with all her senses perfect about her, Rit-

son spoke about her former grandeur in a vague, misty sort of way, that left everything looming in the distance, and magnified by the surrounding fog. Avise kept her first subordinate place. Now and then Ritson startled her by speaking, at moments when her poor, darkened mind seemed to be suddenly illuminated by some flash of recollection as fleeting as it was bright. On such occasions Ritson would commence speaking eagerly on a subject, and presently get lost, and so ramble back again to her old strain. The Misses Thorpe, who supposed that she checked herself purposely, were at the pains of storing up these inadvertencies of speech, and putting them together bit by bit, and making what they could out of them—wondering all the while why so much that seemed worth proclaiming to the world should remain hidden. Miss Lydia, with the aid of her sisters, had from time to time collected and written down the following amongst other sentences, left imperfect by Mrs. Ritson:—

“Grand parties, Miss Susan! what should you know of grand parties? I have seen some grand ones in my day. The greatest people, lords and ladies, the royal dukes and the princesses visited our family, and we went to nearly all the great houses. I remember one great

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party, when young Lord.—Oh, dear!—when our poor Colonel was living, I thought we should always be able to keep up our style. ‘He took great pride in the old Hall; but— I don’t think any of our family was ever buried in a church-yard, as common people must be. We had family vaults and great monuments inside the churches. There was one old monument—never mind. Our dear, good aunt thought to leave us well off: and the Colonel always reckoned on that, as you know, Avice. You know.” Many sentences similar to these, always abruptly brought to a close, and uttered in the presence of Avice, sometimes of Mr. Thorpe, they both receiving them as a matter of course, led the Misses Thorpe to believe that Mrs. Ri-son had in her day been a very great personage indeed; and her manners alone convinced them that she had been highly born. But what a falling off there was in her granddaughter; what a poor tame thing *she* was; how wanting even in the commonest proper pride! It aggravated the Misses Thorpe, who would have been glad to be able to boast that their brother had at least made a good match as far as family was concerned, to see Avice so entirely apathetic; to feel that not a word on this subject could be got out of her.

“It is really shocking to think of that child growing up and not even knowing who her mother belonged to,” said Miss Lydia. “I consider it my duty to collect all the information I can in this way, for hereafter it may be useful to this child. I think it would be quite right to speak to Mrs. Ritson seriously on the subject.”

While saying this, Miss Lydia was quite conscious of not possessing the requisite courage for venturing on such a measure. Not one amongst the three sisters would have demurred at questioning Avice, if they had not feared that, weak as she was, she would directly tell all to Mrs. Ritson or her husband. Avice’s high intelligence ; her noble pride ; her gorgeous imagination, and poetic fancy, and gentle, loving nature, were wasted on the air of this desert that had become her home.

At this period of which we are treating, she had given up all hope of ever hearing from her sister Clementina ; she, however, frequently heard of one other, in whom she continued to take great and compulsorily silent interest. It would have been better for Edward Thorpe if he had not laid that great prohibition on his wife, dooming her to perpetual silence respecting the past, even when they two were alone. If that

prohibition had not from the beginning been ever present to her, checking her utterances of every kind, Avice would very readily and gladly have acknowledged to him her obligations to Mr. Osborne, and willingly shared with him her strong interest in his career. As it was, the interest centred in herself, and obtained a hold of her, strong as a death-grip. Walter Osborne formed for her the sole living link betwixt the present and the past. Her sister had voluntarily abandoned her, and was, therefore, nothing now ; never having been much to herself, or to those best loved by herself. But Walter Osborne, of whom she was now hearing great things ; who was becoming known to the world at large as a rising barrister ; becoming famous from his acute learning and wonderfully forcible eloquence ; how could she help turning to him with her whole heart, knowing of him what she did ? Even there, amongst the Burnham Craggs, it was known that he led an unostentatious life, having his abode always in some poor chambers in the Temple, that had been vacated by a dear friend who had died long ago.

Often, rambling among the rocks in the early morning, or at night-fall, during her husband's absence ; Avice pictured to herself that true

friend of Phillip's, sitting in the room so dearly remembered ; thinking of him—perhaps sometimes thinking of herself ! Avice did not discern anything wrong in thus yielding to these reminiscences of the past ; in cherishing a grateful remembrance of true service. That she had obeyed her husband as far as she could, her wordless life testified ; but he might not fetter her thoughts. And none needed to grudge her the small satisfaction she sought ; because if the pleasure she felt was sometimes exquisite, the pain was also exquisite and more abiding.

CHAPTER V.

It was fortunate for Catherine, whose lot it had been to suffer much from bereavement, that she recognized a high and holy purpose in life, apart from the thought and struggle for self that it is not well to lose sight of. She had greatly loved and honoured her mother, a gentle-hearted, earnest-spirited woman, whose whole life would have been little better than a martyrdom if she had not taken pleasure in self-sacrifice. During the greater part of his married life, Charles Moore had been compelled to encounter a dreary struggle, in order to provide for the wants of his family—the struggle had been dreary in every sense of the word to him, with his ardent, enthusiastic, highly poetical nature, that grappled bravely with difficulties, and yearned to beautify the path trodden by those he loved. It had been dreary because he had not been able to overcome those difficulties until those he loved

had suffered much. Even early in his married career, the young wife of whom he had spoken so tenderly to James Fraser, while they two were at Scarborough, as "my Mary," became a mere household drudge. As is the nature of men, he kept as much as possible out of sight of evils that he could not remedy in the only way he knew of; and his occupation as a writer for bread enabled him to keep much to himself. It was at this part of his career that James Fraser's influence over him became truly dangerous. James Fraser had predicted that such a time would come, and it had arrived. The time in which his high faith in all things great and grand, and holy, and noble, and beautiful, and apparently true, gave way. The gloom and chill of death and dismay fell upon him. He acknowledged the fallacy of his early dreams, and in a very deliberate way prepared himself to sink down. But he was not destined so to sink. Woman's love hunted him to his solitude, and brought him out of it, and then sustained him. Mary Moore had been the kind of woman to bear herself with the dignity of a queen, because of the rich robes and the gems of priceless worth with which she knew that her husband's love would have invested and decorated her if it could;

to appear, and to be at all ordinary times light of heart and cheerful, because she knew that it was the first wish of his life to put all pain and sorrow far away from her. So Charles Moore's home, even in the darkest days of his poverty, was always a cheerful home ; and when real sorrow inevitably entered the house in the shape of bereavement, Mary Moore was still ready to sustain all around her by the example of her own high faith, and hope and resignation. It was she chiefly who made the house so pleasant to her husband's visitors ; who endeared it to so many ; servants and dependents amongst the rest, and amongst these latter to Nurse Rae. In this happy home Catherine grew up ; but thoughtful in her own way. Catherine had seen much that it was well she should see—her mother's struggle for instance, as well as her father's. She knew that her mother had always dreaded the influence of others over her husband ; that above everything she wished to avert the possibility of leaving him entirely to this influence. Therefore, when her health began to fail, she gave many charges to Catherine that the latter stored in her mind.

“ Be quite sure, my child,” she said on her death-bed, “ that God never puts more upon his

creatures than, preserving their trust in Him, they are well able to bear. If you are ever brought in contact with evils that greatly rouse human resistance—with calamities that threaten to sink those who are called upon to endure them—be quite sure that man's hand has been at work, doing what it was wrong to do. Do not fall into the fearful error of holding God accountable for man's work—of expecting Him to interfere with it day by day. Leave everything to the great day of His reckoning; and always keep yourself in readiness to appear before him with your own account."

Her mother's teaching and example; the earnest character of her own mind; the knowledge that had come to her in her home respecting the estimated worth, the struggle, and the weariness of life amongst men of high intellect, had all tended to impress Catherine with a solemn sense of the importance of so dealing with time, from day to day, that its brief present should be neither fruitless nor burdensome; since in either case it must merge into a wasted past, or hurry on into an unconsidered future. If she was thus soberly thoughtful, partly as a natural consequence of her early training and trial, and high-principled, because her faith in

the 'unseen' was perfect, Catherine had one qualification for playing a worthy part in life, that could not be consistently sneered down by any—a deep-seated love of her kind. The world was her present and familiar home; the earnest and strengthening sympathies of her nature claimed a loving and unquestionable kinship with the great brotherhood of humanity. The past was sanctified in her memory; it had left no abiding gloom in her spirit, no abiding weight on her heart: for its sorrow was of the kind that puts sin, the parent of sorrow, out of sight—a tender melancholy, and loving regret, and onward trust, that merges into an atmosphere of peaceful and holy thoughts as naturally as the morning twilight passes into the full blaze of a glorious day. It had left her with the unwasted feeling and fresh life to which new interests, hopes, and fears, and strong affections would come of necessity; and it might be under circumstances that would severely test her fitness for playing so worthy a part in the drama of life as that she had marked out for herself.

During the journey into Yorkshire, Catherine, fortunately for her, was not allowed to make further acquaintance with her uncle, who slept or remained silent nearly the whole way: he

was reserving himself for a grand demonstration at the end of the journey. Quick, and calmly observant as she was, she had formed a pretty correct estimate of Mr. Rycroft's character, so far as it had been revealed to her. His bustling importance, his intense worldliness, his dogged self-esteem, and comfortably hopeless deadness to any outer influences that might materially interfere with his own fixed views or plans about any and everything, were as plainly revealed to her as they could have been during an intercourse of years. Naturally inclined to make allowances for poor human nature, and taught above all things to look for the good that is mixed up with much evil everywhere, Catherine expected to like him better after seeing him frequently in his own home. Her thoughts often wandered to that home during the journey; not to the possible splendour of it—that she was ready to lose sight of directly her uncle allowed her; and she had strong hope that it would not be of an overwhelming kind. Even for her father's sake she wished to be able to love her new-found cousin very dearly; she hoped to like very much the kind aunt who, as Mr. Rycroft said, was expecting her: Uncle — Aunt — Cousin! It was a heart-stirring event to

rine to meet with these relations all at once, not having previously known that the world contained them for her. Mr. Rycroft had put himself into deep mourning; and that circumstance had helped to draw Catherine to him wonderfully. His black clothes seemed to speak to her more eloquently of kinship than anything that she had yet discovered in his nature had been able to do. Yet, on the whole, Mr. Rycroft had exhibited much kind feeling towards her, and she felt grateful, and eager to love those belonging to him if she might not exactly love himself.

At a few minutes past six o'clock on an afternoon early in October, the coach containing Mr. Rycroft and Catherine dashed up the High Street of Selby. If Catherine had known anything of her father's adventures just before her birth, now nineteen years ago, she might have glanced, in passing, at the old-fashioned inn which he and James Fraser had entered, tired and dust-soiled, and which still bore the sign of "The Osborne Arms." The coach stopped at the head inn, "The Red Lion;" and when it stopped, Mr. Rycroft roused himself thoroughly, and began to feel quite himself.

Important passengers had evidently been ex-

pected by this coach; and preparations had been made for their arrival. There was a handsome carriage, in which the colour of yellow greatly predominated, and which was drawn by two spirited grey horses, waiting near the inn door. There were two servants in mourning liveries, a stout coachman, and a tall footman, waiting also. The landlady was waiting at the inn door; the landlord was hovering about, for he opened the door of the coach, to the discomfiture of the tall footman, who had darted forward for that purpose. Several persons were passing to and fro, who seemed to have little else to do than to look about them. The two surviving Misses Winstay—the elder sister and Miss Rebecca—were peering through their spectacles over the dwarf-blind of their parlour-window, which was exactly opposite “The Red Lion.” Several other individuals, male as well as female, were peeping through windows and half-open doors: for it had become generally known that Mr. Rycroft intended to bring a niece down with him from London; and everybody desired to have a look at her, everybody expecting to enjoy the after-pleasure of declaring that she was not worth looking at.

“Glad to see you home, sir,” said the bowing landlord.

"Thank-ee, Dawson," said Mr. Rycroft. "Where's my people? Oh, I see. Thomas, you'll look after Miss Moore's luggage. Catherine, my dear, here's the carriage waiting, and now you'll soon be at home."

"Is there anything I can do for the young lady?" asked the landlady, curtsying as she came forward.

"Nothing; we are obliged to you," said Mr. Rycroft. "Miss Moore is tired, and wishes to get to her journey's end. Ha, Lawrence! is that you? I'm glad to see you. Allow me to introduce you two. Catherine—Mr. Trevor, a very old friend of ours. Lawrence—my niece, Catherine Moore; all that's left me of my sister, Catherine Rycroft, and as like her as two peas are alike. You must become better acquainted."

Catherine, tired, and otherwise occupied, glanced only slightly at the very gentlemanly personage to whom she was thus introduced. Mr. Trevor was a young man, apparently about thirty years of age. He had certainly caught himself staring at Catherine with an intentness that amounted to rudeness; and he met her own calm and transitory gaze with some confusion. He expressed great pleasure at making

the acquaintance of Miss Moore, and trusted that she would make a long stay in Yorkshire.

"I hope so," said Mr. Rycroft. "Miss Moore is perfectly independent, and might fix her abode where she likes ; but at present her natural place seems to be amongst her few remaining kinsfolk. All well at home, I hope ? Make my respects, and let us see you soon."

Mr. Rycroft led Catherine to the carriage. The tall footman had opened the door and put down the steps, but Mr. Trevor kept in advance and handed her in. He then shook hands with Mr. Rycroft, and lifted his hat as the vehicle rolled away. All this time Catherine had been chiefly occupied with the carriage and the servants—these servants in their mourning liveries. Her uncle was wealthy then ; so wealthy, it seemed, that he might well afford to be modest. This wealth and his assumption together, threatened to become oppressive to her. When Mr. Rycroft had settled himself in a corner of the carriage to his liking, he delivered himself as follows :

"You will see, Catherine, that I have paid every possible respect to the memory of my nephew. Immediately, on learning his death, I sent orders for my family to go into mourning.

The young gentleman I have just introduced you to, belongs to one of the few families near us that we can acknowledge an acquaintance with. For many reasons we are compelled to keep very select. The Trevors are not a great family, but they occupy a certain position, and position is everything in this world. Now that young gentleman and his family are persons whose attentions you may encourage ; but don't, with them or any one else, lose sight of the fact that *we* are placed too high to be condescended to. Keep to yourself facts that won't tell to your own advantage ; and in your case that means reveal nothing at all. Leave me to say all that it will be necessary to say respecting your parentage and so forth ; and be sure of this, when people are curious they always mean to be insolent if they have a chance."

Catherine, with her straightforwardness of character, her sufficing self-respect, and perfect openness and sincerity, was sufficiently shocked and alarmed at the glimpse Mr. Rycroft had afforded her of his intention to show her off to the best advantage, and his capacity for doing this, to feel chilled, saddened and regretful, just when her best sympathies were ready to flow most freely. Mr. Rycroft's worldliness and very common-

place pride were again, and in a more painful way, obtruded upon her; forcing aside such pleasant pictures of family happiness and affection, and eager anticipations of the welcome awaiting her companion and herself, as naturally crowded upon her while approaching nearer to her new home. It was scarcely possible to suppose that the wife and child of this self-satisfied and low-thoughted man would be uninfluenced by his views; and it was not clear to her whether even they were not to be so far restricted in a knowledge of the truth concerning herself as to preclude any such free interchange of thought and feeling as could alone insure sympathy and attachment on either side.

When the carriage had passed out of sight, Mr. Trevor pursued his way homeward, soliloquising after this fashion:

"Of all the lucky scamps that ever leagued with fortune against honesty, commend me to John Rycroft! What business has he with such a niece as that? *His* niece; it's all stuff! But didn't he say she was all that was left him of—confound Catherine Rycroft, who ever heard of her before? Is there anybody living that ever heard Mr. Rycroft speak of having a relation? I should decidedly say not; yet here is a niece

of whom he is evidently proud (with a good reason, hang him); and she's certainly independent or he wouldn't own her; and beautiful as an angel, and proud as the devil, I can see. By Jove! what patrician stateliness there is in the way she carries her head, as unlike the Rycroft fussiness, as the great pyramid is to a dunghill! Moore—Moore; I wonder what family of Moores she belongs to; perhaps she's a descendant of the great Moore of Moore Hall. The dragon of Wantley was a native of Yorkshire, and so is Mr. Rycroft. Yes; there must be something wonderful about it or she could not be what she certainly is, and Mr. Rycroft's niece at the same time. Well, I shall astonish them when I reach home."

CHAPTER VI.

CATHERINE MOORE TO GRACE LEE.

"Staunton Court, Oct. 30th.

"HERE I am, settled in my new home. Settled, Grace, but not at rest, because in the true sense of the term this is no home for me. After undergoing some distress, some surprises; after making such acquaintance as seems possible with my new relatives, I have arrived at the above conclusion. But this great, wealthy house, which is not also a happy house, has its mysteries, which I am desirous of fathoming. With this amiable or unamiable intention I shall probably linger here a long time.

"I promised to detail to you all my adventures, to convey to you all my impressions; be assured that I shall always open all my heart to you. What a blessed privilege it is to be allowed to do this! May God long preserve

you, dear Grace, who are to me even as a second self.

“Now seat yourself after your quiet fashion, and fancy that I am talking to you. We arrived at Selby the day before yesterday, while it was yet daylight, and found a handsome private carriage waiting for us, attended by two servants, a coachman and footman, dressed in mourning liveries. Mr. Rycroft had paid the respect to his nephew’s memory of putting all his family in mourning. The few persons we encountered during our brief stay at Selby, paid marked respect to Mr. Rycroft, so that I was compelled to say to myself, ‘Truly Mr. Rycroft is a man of consequence.’ I cannot explain to you why it was that this assurance did not give me any satisfaction, except that I had a previous impression that he was not the kind of man to grace great wealth and high station, or to be graced by them. The carriage bore us a mile or two out of the town amidst beautifully picturesque scenery, and then entered on private grounds by means of a gate to which a lodge was attached. The daylight still served to reveal to me an extensive park, richly studded with patriarchal trees. The noble avenue along which we passed, afforded me, on either side, glimpses of undulating green

sward, diversified by clusters of trees and a broad sheet of water. Looking intently, I saw several hares start out of the long grass, and more than one deer stood gazing at us in the distance. You may understand the state of my feeling towards Mr. Rycroft when I tell you that I did not feel able to express to him my admiration of this scene. I was chiefly occupied in wondering how such a place had come into his possession. I had also been occupied in interpreting the language of his eyes whenever they chanced to meet mine; and this too, had the effect of restraining me. As plainly as eyes could speak they said—‘Is not this something grander and greater than you expected? do you appreciate my condescension now? do you at length, comprehend that I am really an important personage?’ I had a ready but not flattering reply to these interrogations, so I averted my eyes and remained dumb. I suspect that my apparent apathy irritated him. Presently the carriage stopped in front of a really stately mansion of the Elizabethan period. The light still served to disclose to me its gable ends and turrets, its mullioned windows and terraces; and when Mr. Rycroft handed me out of the carriage, he said, ‘Welcome to Staunton Court, Catherine.’ Staunton Court! I had certainly

heard the name before, and I was startled. You may remember how frequently Rupert has quizzed me about a certain Mr. Osborne, whom I have never seen. *I* remembered at the instant that Staunton Court was also the name of the family seat of the Osbornes, and that the latter was situated in Yorkshire. I immediately said to myself, Mr. Rycroft then is a tenant of Mr. Osborne's. Assure Rupert that I shall not escape the Osborne influences by coming to this place. But you shall hear.

“ Mr. Rycroft led me up a flight of steps into a great hall. We had left one tall footman behind us to look to the luggage, but here was another to receive us. Here also we encountered a portly, elderly personage, dressed in plain clothes, whom I rightly divined to be the butler, and a slim page radiant in buttons. The page at once took the lead, and we followed him. He opened a door on the ground floor, and ushered us into a magnificent drawing-room. At least everything connected with the room, its width, and breadth, and height; its furniture and decoration, seemed magnificent to my unaccustomed eyes. If, on returning to rest at night, I had been asked to particularise any of the details, I should have been found at fault. What I par-

ticularly noticed first and last was the occupants of this room, and I hasten to introduce them to you.

“Mr. Rycroft led me to a couch on which was reclined a lady in deep mourning. ‘My niece, Miss Moore,’ he said ; ‘your aunt, Catherine.’

“I will confess to you that at the moment my heart was very full. Without altering her position, the lady held out both her hands and received mine. ‘Then she drew me towards her and kissed my cheek, languidly.

“‘I am glad to see you,’ she said ; ‘very glad indeed. Go to your cousin.’

“I was already aware of the presence of a younger lady, who was reclining in an easy chair with a book in her hands.

“‘Now you two, you are cousins, make friends directly, for I expect dinner is waiting,’ said Mr. Rycroft.

“Elizabeth Rycroft flung on the carpet the book she had been reading, and stood up without advancing a step forward. I went to her. She held out her hand to receive mine, but looked embarrassed.

“‘Now kiss one another and have done with it,’ said Mr Rycroft.

“Elizabeth pouted. She was evidently a spoilt child, who was not accustomed to be ordered to do anything. I bent towards her, for she is considerably shorter in stature than myself, and finally she lifted her very rosy mouth and we exchanged a kiss.

“‘Elizabeth, my dear, ring the bell for Fanchion,’ said Mrs. Rycroft; ‘your cousin will like to go to her dressing-room before dinner. Catherine, come and sit by me for a minute.’

“I walked back to the couch and seated myself by its occupant. Mr. Rycroft had quitted the room.

“‘My dear,’ said Mrs. Rycroft, ‘I hope you won’t take it unkind of me if I don’t speak much with you about your loss. Unhappily for me my feelings are very strong, and I dare not allow myself to dwell on dismal subjects. Before you was born I had losses by death; and once in black seemed to be always in black, for one death followed another till I thought I should go out of my mind. I’m sure when Mr. Rycroft wrote and said we were to go into mourning, I was quite scarred. I’d had experience, you know; and when there’s young people about, the consequences are serious. I’m older than you, my dear, and I know what wonders time works,

and I do hope we shall soon be able to be cheerful. We're in a neighbourhood that looks up to us, and we're used to be hospitable ; and this is an interruption that we didn't look for. Never mind, my dear. Oh, John, tell Fanchion she's wanted (the footman who had appeared disappeared). In my own mind, my dear, I'm quite sure that it's sinful to grieve overmuch. When my first husband died I was quite resigned to the will of the Lord. I'd so many blessings left that I couldn't murmur ; and I've been rewarded for bearing patiently, and so may recommend my example to others. We'll not mention the subject again, my dear ; it's more than enough to me to see black clothes about me. Fanchion, show Miss Moore to her dressing-room.'

"I rose to follow the pert-looking, French waiting-maid, who, at this moment, made her appearance. Ah, Grace ! do not expect me to explain to thee all my feelings at this moment. Thou wilt know how readily, hadst thou been nigh, I should have turned to thy bosom and wept. Great God ! how gracious Thou art in allowing us to turn to Thee under all circumstances and at all times !

"With the help of Fanchion I washed my

face and hands, and smoothed my hair, and then descended to the dining-room. This also was a magnificent room, oak-pannelled and covered with portraits, executed, as I afterwards understood, by Holbein, Lely, Kneller, Reynolds, and Romilly. They were evidently family portraits, and, as sometimes happens in families, the same style of face and figure seemed to have been perpetuated through many generations. The latter was tall, stalwart, masculine in the women: the former, strong-featured, swarthy to grimness, yet nevertheless strikingly handsome in the men. I felt quite sure that these portraits represented a portion of the Osborne family, for the personal appearance of the present Mr. Osborne had been described to me, and I at once recognised the likeness. I made no remark, and asked no question, but again busied myself with wondering how this old family mansion could possibly have come into the possession of Mr. Rycroft.

"The dinner promised to be first-rate. There was fish and soup to begin with, and both the footman and butler were waiting. A quiet cup of tea and the absence of those domestics would have pleased me much better. The glitter of costly plate and glass on the table and sideboard

did not gratify me. This specimen of the everyday style in which the Rycrofts lived impressed me with a due sense of their importance, but I did not like them any better for it. I said to myself, 'I am surely altogether out of my place here.'

"I was seated next Mrs. Rycroft at her left hand, and opposite me was a vacant chair. Elizabeth sat opposite, but near her father. I was wondering whether or not another guest was expected, when the footman handed me a plate of soup, delivered to him by his mistress. Then Mr. Rycroft exclaimed with impatience, 'Is she intending to come or not, do you think?'

"In a low tone Mrs. Rycroft said, 'Never mind.'

"I glanced at Elizabeth, who just then uttered an impatient exclamation. Her countenance was at once expressive of surprise and annoyance. 'I didn't expect we should be bored with her,' she said, 'and she won't like it herself, you'll see. A disagreeable thing!'

"'Silence!' said Mr. Rycroft; 'she must get used to it.'

"Just then I heard the rustling of strange garments. Some one was gliding into the room. I again glanced at Elizabeth, whose face was

turned towards the door. Her countenance was strongly expressive of aversion, as she uttered the single word, 'Boggart !' Then I was aware that some one was standing opposite me, and I looked up and beheld—an Apparition.

"A tall, large-boned, attenuated woman, who resembled a disinterred corpse, rather than anything living. Her face, even to the lips, was bloodless, and as white as a naturally dark complexion would admit of its being. She wore no cap, and her long hair, perfectly white, was coiled round her head in a singular fashion. Her eyebrows were black ; her eyes, large, black, restless, and piercing. Her dress seemed to be of black serge, the sleeves were tight to the wrist, and the only relief to its heavy sombreness was a small linen collar, worn round the throat. Before a word was spoken, I knew that she was an Osborne. Instantly she fixed upon me those large, piercing eyes, and I shrank from their expression, for it was perfectly malignant. She had pushed the chair away and remained standing.

" ' I did not expect this,' she exclaimed ; ' you have deceived me.'

"All this was sufficiently startling to me. She had not addressed herself to any individual, her anger seemed to be levelled at all present.

Her voice was singularly strong and deep toned ; it seemed to leave a vibration on my ear.

“ ‘It’s only my niece,’ said Mr. Rycroft. ‘We’re quite a family party. Sit down, Miss Osborne.’ ”

“The malignant glance wandered from me to Mr. Rycroft, and from him to Elizabeth and her mother. I never saw anything so expressive of intense hatred as it was. Notwithstanding this, and contrary to my expectation, Miss Osborne took her seat at the table as she had been in a manner ordered to do. All this time I had not been able to remove my gaze from her. I caught one hurried, frenzied, upward look, and then her eyelids dropped, her head bowed slightly, and she clasped her hands together. I thought she was about to utter a grace for herself. I was mistaken. With an intensity of feeling that no language could give you an idea of, she uttered the single word, ‘My!’ ”

“The dinner proceeded as if nothing extraordinary had happened. Miss Osborne seemed to do justice to it. Mr. Rycroft astonished me by the immensity of his appetite. He ate of every dish, and that more than once ; and there were three courses, besides pastry, jellies, and blanc-mange. He asked me to take wine with him,

but did not pay the same compliment to Miss Osborne, who also took wine. A good deal of conversation went on, in which all joined except Miss Osborne, who did not speak, and was evidently not expected to speak.

"At the conclusion of the meal, Mr. Rycroft pronounced grace. Miss Osborne rose from her chair, and first directing to us, severally, the same malignant glance that I had noticed before, she turned to leave the room. This Apparition, as I must still name her, seemed to fascinate me so, that I could not help following her with my eyes. Before reaching the door, she stopped, stood still for a few seconds. I felt as sure, as if I had seen the act, that she had again clasped her hands together. In the same unutterably profound tone, she again ejaculated that single word, 'My!' Then she walked out, the footman holding the door open for her.

"The table was speedily cleared; dessert was placed upon it, and then the servants departed.

" 'Now,' said Mr. Rycroft, selecting a decanter, and filling his glass, 'let us enjoy ourselves. But first, Elizabeth, are there any letters for me?'

"Elizabeth said there were three or four, and fetched them. For a short time Mr. Rycroft was occupied in opening and reading these

epistles. Elizabeth seemed to be wholly occupied with a plate of walnuts. Mrs. Rycroft desired me to draw my chair closer to hers, and began speaking to me in a low, confidential tone.

“ ‘ You see, my dear, we have a disagreeable inmate,’ she said ; ‘ I mean Miss Osborne. She is touched here, as you could see’ (Mrs. Rycroft put her hand to her head), ‘ and we have altogether a sad piece of work with her. Your uncle undertook the guardianship of her nearly twenty years ago, and when I married him, I found that the charge of her fell chiefly on myself. I can’t tell you what a trouble it has been to me. When Elizabeth was a child, she was terribly frightened of her. I believe the servants helped it on by always calling Miss Osborne the ‘ boggart’—that means a ghost, you know. For many years I was obliged to keep Miss Osborne out of her sight, or she would have screamed herself to death. Elizabeth still hates the sight of her, and altogether it is a great worry to me. I hope she won’t be any annoyance to you, my dear. She doesn’t take any meal with us, except dinner, and not that when there’s company. She seems to know that she is not fit for company ; and you might

observe that she was in a rage just now because you were here. She's got her own rooms, and her own servant, a woman who has been used to mad people—we had her from one of the hospitals. She's not at all dangerous, you know, and I hope you don't feel afraid of her.'

"I assured her that I had not the least fear."

" 'She's been a great charge to me as I've told you,' continued Mrs. Rycroft; "when there's anything extra to do for her, I must do it. It would be a great help to me if Elizabeth wasn't so timorous; she won't take any part at all to lighten my burden. Miss Osborne has her own carriage, and she takes an airing every day; and your uncle won't hear of her going out with only Mrs. Sumner—that's her keeper; so I'm obliged to keep them company. I assure you this is a great trial to me every day of my life.'

"Something beyond the desire of relieving Mrs. Rycroft prompted me to say, 'I shall be very happy to relieve you of this duty occasionally, if you can trust me. I am not at all afraid of Miss Osborne, and I am sure I should like it.'

" 'That's very good of you,' said Mrs. Rycroft. 'Oh, I see you'll be very useful to me, and a great comfort. You look steady, and you've steady ways I can see. Elizabeth has been a

bit spoilt, and she's of such a lively turn, she won't bear anything to fret her. Then, my dear, you and me will go out with Miss Osborne till she gets used to your company, and then you and Sumner can manage. You see, she doesn't want any of us, but it don't do to let people think we neglect her. It's only the look of the thing. One thing you must mind—never speak to her. If she says anything wild, you'll know what's the matter with her ; to be sure she has the wildest fancies in the world ; but she doesn't talk, except to herself, when she's alone. Well, I really do feel thankful.'

"Having finished his letters, Mr. Rycroft began to enjoy himself. He drank wine freely ; he opened a conversation in which Elizabeth did not join, and in which I did not play a conspicuous part. I cannot allow that my having been accustomed to the society of highly cultivated and intelligent persons has spoiled me for all other society. When people are hearty and natural, I feel at home with them at once. But it is a fact that I did not feel at home with my new-found relatives. Mr. Rycroft cannot speak on any subject without offensively obtruding his own importance. He is not an educated man ; not a naturally intelligent man ; he can be rough

sometimes, but not in the right way. I could forget his possessions, and forgive his pride in them, and overlook his evident ignorance, if, like some others who have made a wonderful rise in the world, he would boldly and honestly boast of the great things he has achieved by means of some power inherent in himself. Mr. Rycroft has no frankness of that or any other kind about him. He is boastful in his own close and repelling way, which precludes any sympathy. He talked to me, as he avowed, with the object of cheering me up. He spoke of families in the neighbourhood who would be well inclined to make much of me; of connections of his elsewhere that it would be highly advantageous for me to be brought into contact with. What he had once promised to do he was inclined to perform, and he had power enough and to spare. 'Get over your troubles, Catherine,' he said, 'and then look as high as you like; I'll help you through.' This was the style of his conversation. You will at once perceive the impertinence of it, and the arrogance of the man, and his perfect self-sufficiency. It did not once occur to him that I might not be thankful for this kind of patronage, least of all that I could object to it. Mrs. Rycroft was equally boastful in her

own way. She said she found her's a very responsible situation indeed, as the leader and chief personage in a very wealthy and populous neighbourhood. I must witness one of her grand entertainments before I could understand what was expected of her, and what she had to do. Mrs. Rycroft could not help thinking that riches were a great snare; people seemed to expect her to forget that she had a soul to attend to.

"Throughout all this I made myself most atrociously and deceitfully amiable. What else could I do? I had no resource in Elizabeth, who had retreated to an easy chair by the fire, and fallen asleep, or pretended to do so. Mrs. Rycroft informed me confidentially, that Elizabeth had been greatly annoyed at having to go into mourning, as several balls on which she had greatly reckoned must be postponed or not attended by her in consequence. I do believe that Mrs. Rycroft had no idea of making me feel uncomfortable; in her own way she was as outspoken as any one could desire.

"And I do not pretend to say that the young lady's affliction, and my particular share in bringing it about, troubled me very much. I, as you know, Grace, have seen something of the real afflictions of life; and I have little sympathy with

such as are trifling or imaginary. It was strange that I, coming to this house with every wish to take to my heart its ostensible inmates, should in less than an hour after my arrival find all my interest centering in an individual whom I had not expected to meet; of whom I had previously heard nothing; and who, for the most distressing and humiliating reasons in the world, seemed utterly cut off from myself. True it is that Miss Osborne, who seemed so thoroughly to detest her guardian and his family, and myself as one of the family; who appeared to me at once as the mere wreck of a human being, so that there could be no hope of intercourse between us, alone made any impression on my heart. Remember that if I had not been told she was insane, I should merely have thought that she was unutterably miserable. That was my first impression, and it abides with me. Think of her living in this state twenty years! a mockery to the servants, a terror to the young child who grew up to hold her in aversion; a trouble and distress altogether to Mrs. Rycroft; and to Mr. Rycroft—what? And all this has befallen her in her own home, of which strangers are now the masters. I do not understand why she is not now a raving maniac, instead of the sternly-

enduring woman that she seems to be to me. How did all this happen at first? Twenty years ago, she must have been a young woman. And, Grace, Mr. Osborne must be her brother, or her cousin. I wonder if the Rycrofts will ever speak of Mr. Osborne. I shall wait and see.

“The timepiece struck nine o'clock, when tea was announced. Shortly afterwards, all the household was assembled for prayers. There were more servants, male and female, than I could count. When they had retired, we also prepared to retire to rest. Mr. and Mrs. Rycroft kissed me when they bade me good night; but Elizabeth only lightly placed her hand in mine, and then hurried away. Elizabeth evidently does not feel disposed to be friendly with me. Is it possible that she can be thus hostile because through my means she has been compelled to wear mourning for a short time? I cannot tell to what lengths a spoilt child may go, but I feel sorry that Elizabeth is not more friendly, because I like her appearance, which I will describe to you.

“In figure she is shorter than I am, and very plump, and not ungraceful. Her face is round and rosy, her eyes and hair dark brown, her mouth a little too large, her nose short and thick,

her forehead low and narrow. This face is neither intellectual nor beautiful, but the brilliant complexion seems to set it off and defy you to find fault with its details. When Elizabeth laughs, she is a perfect picture of good humour. On the other hand, when she is out of temper, that low forehead of hers can scowl sadly. But what I admire in her, and what makes me forbear with her, is a childlike look, and a childishness of manner altogether, especially when she is pouting. If she was not so big, I should be tempted to take her on my knee and ask what was the matter with her. As it is, I must still bear with Elizabeth as I would with a child.

“Mrs. Rycroft has been very like her daughter; she is now very stout, but still good-looking; she is younger than her husband; illiterate, as you will have observed; common-place in character and very weakly vain; but friendly to me as far as the poverty of her nature will admit of her appearing or being friendly. I lay thinking, not of her, but of Miss Osborne, until I fell asleep.

“Yesterday morning I was awakened by Fanchion, who brought me a cup of chocolate. The animal wants of every one in this house are well attended to. Through my window, looking towards the east, the sunshine was streaming

brightly, and I arose and dressed myself in haste, declining the services of Fanchon, who expressed a great desire to arrange my hair in a different style. Finally, I think she quitted me in a pet. This is a large old mansion, and upstairs there are many rambling galleries. I had some difficulty in steering my way to the ground floor. On arriving there, the first sight that presented itself to me through the open hall-door was Elizabeth mounted on a spirited horse. In her riding habit and hat decorated with a drooping black feather, she looked very handsome. I went out and shook hands with her. She told me she had just returned from a scamper of six miles, and seemed much more affable than she had been on the preceding night. As you know, Grace, and thanks to the alleged delicacy of constitution that induced the doctors to prescribe horse exercise for me, I am myself a fearless rider, and I envied Elizabeth her scamper of six miles amidst scenery as beautiful, perhaps, as is to be met with anywhere. I fear I envied the rich glow of health on her face. At any rate I admired it. I must inform you that when I made my appearance she was in conversation with a youth apparently about fifteen years of age. He had a fine open countenance, and I thought he resembled some

one I had seen before. Presently Elizabeth said,

“ ‘This is Charles Trevor, Miss Moore; Charley, this is my cousin.’

“ ‘Oh, I’ve heard all about her,’ said Charles, looking at me with his merry eyes.

“ ‘Indeed,’ I said, ‘you have the advantage of me; I never heard of you before.’

“ ‘I heard all about you from my brother who saw you last night,’ said the boy. ‘I won’t tell you what he said, but he’s been quizzed about it rarely.’

“ ‘Mr. Lawrence Trevor is smitten with your charms, Miss Moore,’ said Elizabeth, leaping lightly from her horse. ‘There, Charley, lead him round, and then come and take a second breakfast with us.’

“ Elizabeth tripped into the house, and Charles Trevor moved off with her horse. For an instant I felt rather foolish, left standing there alone. Fortunately I was attracted by the scene lying before and around me. The park seemed to be of great extent, and in the distance, where the trees grew thickest, the rich varieties of foliage and of autumnal tints were beautiful to see. The park had originally been laid out by skilful hands. At intervals the ground rose abruptly to a con-

siderable height, and groups of noble trees, scattered here and there, half hid and half revealed the most picturesque spots. Glimmering amid the foliage of trees appeared more than one broad sheet of water that reflected back the pale but brilliant sunshine. The early dew still sparkled amidst the long grass; and on an eminence at some distance stood an antlered deer, that presently darted away and again appeared at intervals in vistas formed by the swelling ground and clustering trees.

“Among the things for which I should be inclined to covet wealth, if I gave my mind to covetousness of that kind, is the power of surrounding oneself with whatever is most beautiful in nature. I love well the wild, uncultivated scenery that is ever the grandest; but an old ancestral domain like this has also peculiar charms for me. Unbonnetted as I was, I should well have liked to start forth on an exploring expedition, and I had quite forgotten my recent annoyance, when a servant appeared, to tell me that breakfast was waiting. I turned away, feeling that my heart and eyes had been alike refreshed, and entered the house.

“At the breakfast-table, besides Charles Trevor, I found another guest, who was intro-

duced to me by the name of Dr. Frank. He was a stout, jovial-looking man, about forty-five years of age. He was evidently one of those favoured mortals, who greatly enjoy life from day to day, and who meet with no obstacle to their enjoyment for a lengthened term. I said to myself, involuntarily, this man has a happy home. He seemed to be brimming over with good humour. He was all cordiality with me, and said he knew I should speedily become one of his favourites. Mr. Rycroft, on the contrary, was out of temper. His countenance is very repulsive at such times ; he is not open even in expressing his wrath, and he looks vindictive. The effect of this is not to excite fear, but dislike only, for he does not possess the dignity or force of character necessary to rouse in others any positive passion. I saw that Mrs. Rycroft's face was also overclouded. Elizabeth and Charles Trevor chatted and laughed together, taking no notice of any one.

"Presently I was made to comprehend that Dr. Frank had been called up early, in order to attend upon a woman, who, during the night, had been half killed by a drunken husband. He had found her seriously injured, and the husband had absconded. The doctor had a

peculiar difficulty to contend with in this case ; he was not quite sure, he said, that the woman would recover ; a great deal depended on good nursing, and the bad character of husband and wife had occasioned them to be held in general abhorrence, so that no one seemed willing to attend to her in this extremity. The man, Dick Hallett, had been heard to declare since committing this outrage, that Mr. Rycroft would see him safely through, and he didn't care. He kept himself out of the way, nevertheless.

“ ‘ I never could understand why you always took Hallett's part,’ said Mrs. Rycroft, addressing her husband. ‘ You know I always considered it a disgrace to us.’

“ ‘ You know nothing about it,’ said Mr. Rycroft, impatiently. ‘ If Hallett had possessed a decent wife, he would have been a decent man. It was her drunken habits that ruined him.’

“ ‘ You mean to say, then,’ said Dr. Frank, ‘ that, like our first ancestor, only with a slight alteration, Hallett may declare, “ The woman tempted me, and I did drink.” I do not believe a word of it. Gervase told me this morning, that his mother, like himself, is a teetotaller, and always has been one. A woman of strong passions she may be, but I charge all her

violence on her husband's conduct and treatment. I never attended her before, but having done so now, I protest that her constitution is not that of an habitual hard drinker. She has had the reputation of being one these sixteen years, and I begin to feel that she has been hardly used.'

" 'But, Dr. Frank,' said Mr. Rycroft, 'you know that Hallett has always kept the vilest of company, and that his wife always made that sort of people welcome at her house. If any decent body went near her, she drove them away. When the poor little curate, Mr. Brook, once went to visit her, she threw all sorts of things at him, and would have murdered him if he hadn't gone off. If nobody will help her now, it's her own fault.'

" 'Pooh! she acted according to her husband's orders,' said Dr. Frank. 'Peggy Hallett is the most devoted of wives—that's the great secret. Hasn't he beaten her nearly to a mummy more than a hundred times before this, and did anybody ever hear of her complaining? She does not complain of him now. In spite of his blows and abuse, and ill-treatment altogether, she cleaves to him. If he could beat the love out of her, she might become a respectable woman ;

you look astonished, Miss Moore, but I never was more in earnest in my life. Ah, Rycroft, two easy-going fellows like you and me, may never know to what lengths a woman's devotion will go ! If I say a wrong word to Mrs. Frank, she's up in arms in a moment, and I'm glad to make peace on the most ignoble terms. I confess I don't understand it all.'

" 'It all depends upon how you married people begin life,' said Charles Trevor, turning his saucy face towards us. 'Dick Hallett beats his wife once a day, and twice on Sunday for a treat. That's how they manage, and she's used to it. You see if she doesn't get over this.'

" 'You're a young villain, Charles,' said Dr. Frank, looking as angry as he could. 'I left Gervase waiting on his mother, and I know he reckons on your help, for he told me you would be sure to come to him. This is no joke, I can tell you.'

" 'I'll not fail Gervase,' said Charles Trevor, rising ; 'I was just about to start before you said that. I like Gervase ; I like him because he always took his mother's part. Didn't I always take it when nobody would believe me, not even you ? Gervase and I have been like brothers. I taught him to read and write, and

he taught me to swim and row, and climb the rocks like a wild goat. You just tell them at home that I've hired myself out. I'll stick to Gervase as long as I can be of any use to him.'

" 'God bless the boy !' exclaimed Dr. Frank, as the former darted out of the room ; ' he's a true Trevor, though a wild one ; a better heart never beat. What he says is true though I've taken upon myself to rebuke him. But the woman must not be left to the sole care of those two lads. It's my opinion that she has something of importance on her mind, at least I judge so, from a few words she let drop. I've been looking for our vicar, who isn't at home, and to tell you the truth I came here in search of him. I think he ought to see her. She's a little rambling, and before long she may be delirious.'

" 'What—what did she say then?—what did you hear?' asked Mr. Rycroft.

" 'His voice had undergone such a change that I could not help looking at him. He was visibly agitated. His usually ruddy complexion was now of a pale purplish colour ; his hands shook so that the cup and saucer he held rattled together. He placed these on the table.

" 'I understood from her words that Gervase was not Hallett's son,' said Dr. Frank. 'Ger-

vase himself understood that much, and in the midst of his grief he leaped up wild with joy, 'say that again, mother,' he exclaimed; 'say that again; tell me that I may look up like a man!' She had been rambling, I suspect; for she wouldn't say anything more just then. For my part, I don't believe that Gervae is her son either; and for the young man's sake I should like all the truth to come out.'

" 'What is the mattter with you, father?' asked Elizabeth, sharply.

" 'Good gracious, John, what *is* the matter?' exclaimed Mrs. Rycroft, rising and approaching him; 'you look quite ill!' Dr. Frank, I thought, seemed to be too indifferent.

" 'It's nothing—nothing, I tell you,' said Mr. Rycroft, motioning her back. 'Sit down and be quiet. I've not got over the fatigue of my journey, Dr. Frank. A little rest will set me all right.'

" 'I'm sorry I troubled you on this matter,' said Dr. Frank. 'I think I must write you out a prescription before leaving you. Elizabeth, give me pen and ink.'

" 'Don't move, Elizabeth,' said Mr. Rycroft, peremptorily. 'Dr. Frank, sit still and hear what I have to say. I'm much obliged to you for letting me know this; it was right that I

should know it. As you all say, I've been too much of a friend to that vagabond, Hallett. I believed all his tales against his wife, and now I ought to make her some amends. Leave her to me, I'll provide a nurse and whatever else may be necessary; I'll visit her myself. If you meet the vicar, Dr. Frank, send him to me; when will you see her again?"

"Not till the afternoon, unless I'm fetched," said Dr. Frank; "I've other patients to visit. But there can be no occasion for you to take all this trouble and charge on yourself, Mr. Rycroft."

"That's my business," said Mr. Rycroft, who had resumed his natural manner along with his natural colour. "This is just a case for Miss Osborne to interfere with. Deeds of charity form the only pleasure of her life, as you all know. I shall mention the circumstances to her, and she'll supply whatever money is needed at once. You see I shall not be at any cost."

"I did not myself regard it as a case requiring charity," said Dr. Frank. "Everybody knows that Dick Hallett is never without plenty of money, though it's a marvel to all where he gets it."

"Dr. Frank," I said—I could not help saying it; "for the honour of your town do not leave

me to suppose that you really could not find a nurse willing to attend to this poor woman. Are you aware that you said as much ?

“ ‘I am glad you mentioned it,’ he said, laughing slightly. ‘I was angry and made the worst of a bad case. It is true that two or three respectable nurses on whom I called refused point blank. You don’t understand what a strong prejudice there is against the Halletts. Peggy herself never would allow a neighbour to go near her, so she has no friends. But I’ve no doubt that common humanity will drive many to her without asking. Of course I could have got a nurse out of the Workhouse, and that’s what I meant to do before going home. So I must leave it all in your hands, Mr. Rycroft ?’

“ ‘Yes ; leave everything to me ; I’ll see about it directly ; I really feel interested about this young man, Gervase. The sooner something is done, the better ; so good morning, Dr. Frank.’

“ Dr. Frank took his leave, and for a minute or two we all remained silent. At length Mrs. Rycroft said, ‘I can’t think why you didn’t leave Dr. Frank to get a nurse. He’s the proper person to do it. I hope you don’t expect me to trouble myself with looking for one.’

“ ‘I don’t expect anything of the sort,’ said

‘Mr. Rycroft ; ‘but if I wished you to nurse this woman yourself, I should expect you to do it. And the fact is, Mrs. Rycroft, I should like to send a nurse from my own house. I suppose not one amongst your pampered servants would choose to go ?’

“ ‘I’m sure not one of them should go,’ said Mrs. Rycroft. ‘I never heard of such a thing.’

“ ‘I believe my father is expecting me to offer my services,’ said Elizabeth, looking up from a newspaper she was reading.

“ ‘I ought to have so brought you up that you would be ready to do my bidding, whatever it might be,’ said Mr. Rycroft. ‘You know, or ought to know—if you don’t, your cousin Catherine may be able to tell you—that on the continent, ladies of the highest rank employ themselves in waiting on the poorest people when they are sick, both at their own homes and in hospitals ; and they don’t consider it degrades them. What do you think about it, Catherine ?’

“ Mr. Rycroft looked at me as he spoke. I thought there was a good deal of meaning in his look. I felt sure he did not merely wish me to chime in with his opinion. He certainly expected that I should offer my personal services. For reasons of my own, I held back.

“ ‘It is true that such is the custom on the continent, and it is a very good one,’ I said. ‘The Catholic Church enjoins such acts of humiliation. But I believe it is only the destitute poor who are so attended. Those who can pay for attendance should do so, I think; else the professional nurses would fare badly.’

“ Mr. Rycroft frowned darkly; he positively writhed in his chair. I saw he was digging his nails into his palms. Elizabeth glanced at him for an instant, then rose up and walked out of the room. Considering how much the case of this poor woman had agitated and was continuing to agitate him, I could not avoid supposing that she had some important secret in her keeping, which he dreaded being divulged during the threatened wandering of her mind. I began to imagine that this might have some reference to the insanity, real or pretended, of Miss Osborne. I was intensely interested; I quite made up my mind to offer my services as nurse to this poor woman, but I wished to receive further proof of the importance of my doing so to Mr. Rycroft.

“ ‘What in the world is to be done, then?’ said Mr. Rycroft. ‘I suppose I had better send one of the servants to look for a nurse. I can

only think of the workhouse, and that's where Dr. Frank was going himself.'

" 'A workhouse nurse won't do in this case,' said Mr. Rycroft impatiently. 'How the woman talks !'

" 'It's how *you* talk, I think. I never heard anything like it ! whatever *do* you mean ? Do you really want *me* to go ? Or perhaps you'd like to ask Miss Moore. That would be a nice way of showing your niece off !'

" Mr. Rycroft glanced furtively at me as she spoke. I again read in his look what he hoped or expected from me. I began to pity him, so I said : ' If I can really be of any use, especially if no one else is to be had, I am quite willing to go at once. I assure you, Mrs. Rycroft, that I have had considerable experience amongst the sick, both in my own home and the houses of the poor. In this same way my mother was a great benefactor to her kind, and she bequeathed me her example. Only two months ago I attended the death-bed of an old servant, who died in the workhouse. You see, Mrs. Rycroft, you need make no objection on my account. I positively should like to go ; I feel interested in this poor woman and her son.'

" 'Now, Mrs. Rycroft,' said Mr. Rycroft, rising

from his chair and brightening up, 'this is my niece, and I'm proud of her. She's independent, and acts as she likes, and does what she likes, and cares for nobody. My niece is too much of a lady to mind people's opinions. Recollect that I expect everybody to honour her as a lady ought to be honoured; them that don't, won't come here. Catherine, come with me to the library; I've something to say to you.'

"As I spoke, Mrs. Rycroft reddened violently, and I saw that she intended to remonstrate; but what her husband said evidently cowed her. All this was very unsatisfactory, but I said nothing more, and followed Mr. Rycroft out of the room. We entered the library together. There were few books in it, but in other respects it was handsomely furnished. Mr. Rycroft placed me in a chair, and seated himself opposite.

" 'Now, Catherine,' he began (I noticed that he laboured under considerable constraint, and that he rarely looked me full in the face), 'I'm very much pleased to see that you've the sort of spirit that'll be a credit to me and mine, as well as to yourself. That sort of spirit belongs to good blood; common people haven't got it, and we don't want them to understand it. Now, I know you can be very discreet, and I'll trust a

secret to you. You see that we've got a charge on our hands—a very troublesome one—I mean the lady you saw last night, Miss Osborne. Of course, you understand that she isn't in her right mind. She was left in my charge by her father, twenty years ago. There's a history connected with her, but I'm not at liberty to tell you that. I'm forced to say that she disgraced herself and her family. Now, I believe there's only three people in the world know anything about this disgrace—myself and Dick Hallett and his wife. I've felt myself bound in honour to keep this secret at any price, but keeping it has been the torment of my life. You heard it said just now that I always favoured Dick Hallett. Curse him ! I've spent a fortune on him, in order to stop his tongue. *He* stopped his wife's tongue. Now you will understand the danger that threatens. This woman is left alone; she's in a state to say anything without intending to say it; and if anybody is to hear her, everything may become known. Of course, that wouldn't hurt me, in reputation or pocket; but it would hurt my feelings, and I know there's one that would hardly survive such a blow. Miss Osborne has a brother —'

"Mr. Rycroft did not stop; I interrupted him.

‘Mr. Osborne, the barrister, is her brother, then?’
I said. ‘I thought so when I saw her.’

“‘How! do *you* know Mr. Osbórne?’ exclaimed Mr. Rycroft, his face darkening.

“‘Only by report,’ I said. ‘His personal appearance had been described to me, and I traced the resemblance in her, and also in the portraits. The family likeness is very marked.’

“‘Yes, see one Osborne you’ve seen all,’ said Mr. Rycroft. ‘Mr. Osborne won’t own his sister, won’t look upon her at all. She has a dread of him. If we wanted to frighten her to death, we only need tell her her brother was coming. They’ve been a proud family, Catherine; pride drove nearly all of them mad. I, as an old friend of the family, have respect and love for them; and they’ve trusted to me for help, and I’ll help them to the last, whatever it costs me. You see what Miss Osborne is—quite a wreck. It would not signify to her if her disgrace was proclaimed all over Europe; but it would be the death of her brother. You’ve heard of him, you say; you must have heard that he’s a fine, clever fellow. Now, for his sake, Catherine, you must help us at this pinch.’

“For his sake! You must not laugh at me, Grace, when I confess that, at the moment, some

echo in my heart seemed to repeat those words. I became very brave on a sudden, and more intensely interested. I respected Mr. Rycroft more than I had hitherto done, and began to put confidence in him. I urged him to let me depart at once.

“ ‘ You’re right, there’s no time to be lost,’ he said. ‘ Prepare yourself to be away some days, and be quick. I’ll order the carriage ; I shall go with you.’ ”

“ I hurriedly packed up a small parcel, including pens and writing-paper, put on my bonnet and cloak, and walked down stairs. The hall door was open, Mr. Rycroft stood on the steps, and the carriage was waiting. I paused a minute, thinking that Mrs. Rycroft would make her appearance, and wishing to speak with her before I went ; but Mr. Rycroft beckoned me forward, and hurried me into the carriage.

“ ‘ It’s of no use contending with your aunt about the matter,’ he said, as we drove away ; ‘ she has her own notions, but when I return home I’ll make it all right. She’s very high, is your aunt ; she’s used to being looked up to ; and she can’t bear the thought of anybody belonging to her doing what’s beneath them to do. I’ll get her to see it all in the right light without

letting her into our secret ; you understand. As a rule, I never trust women with secrets ; and it would worry her to death to have such a matter on her mind. Oh, she'll be quite pleasant when you meet again. You'll see that she'll be the first to inform everybody of the doings of her eccentric niece. I know her.'

"How readily our moods change ! I began to feel annoyed. I did not like the idea of Mrs. Rycroft informing everybody of the doings of her eccentric niece. I found that I had not acted with such prudence as I intended. I meant that Mr. Rycroft should speak out before I acted ; and, instead of that, the proposal had come from myself. Both Mr. and Mrs. Rycroft could bear witness to that. Mr. Rycroft also might with impunity marvel at the eccentricity of his niece ; and very probably it would suit his purpose to do so. I imagined how disdainfully Elizabeth would toss her head. Here I had got myself into a scrape, through boasting of my philanthropy ! I began to feel very foolish. I tried to think of Mr. Osborne. At other times, cannot I think of him without trying ? We can only banish our best thoughts when we feel that we must blush in their presence.

"On the way, Mr. Rycroft gave me some

instructions as to how I was to act. As much as possible, I was to remain alone with the woman ; to admit no visitor except the doctor, on the plea of keeping her quiet ; above all, I was to keep her son out of her room. Whatever she might give utterance to, bearing on the subject he had named, I was to store in my mind, or write down and repeat to himself alone.

“ You’ll be doing the woman herself a great service,” said Mr. Rycroft, “ for if she blabs, her husband will as sure murder her as she’s born. It suits Dick himself to keep the secret, for he makes money by it. It would be a good thing if they were both in heaven ; they and ’— he stopped abruptly, and bit his lip, till the blood started.

“ Now, Grace, just consider us as a couple of benevolent persons bound on an errand of mercy. That was our aspect before the world. Mr. Rycroft, I felt convinced, had a keener sense of the degradation of the position in which I was about to place myself, than his wife had. I saw how the affair disgusted him even in this one phase of it ; and for my satisfaction, I felt convinced that my evident sincerity had inspired his contempt, though he was fain to make use of it. His own terror was real enough ; but then

it seemed scarcely natural to me that such a man as Mr. Rycroft should be genuinely and generously concerned for others. Was there not some fear for self in all this? Was not this great uncle of mine, who would not meet my full look, aware that I might learn more respecting some secret of his own than he would at all like if there was any help for it? I began to feel very shrewd and important, though I did not at all like my position. But trust a woman for keeping on the track when she has once scented a mystery. I would not have turned back if I could. We drove past the town, which lay to the right of us, and shortly afterwards came in view of the sea. I saw several cottages lying detached, and here and there boats were moored on the sand, and nets were spread out to dry. I supposed that these were the abodes of fishermen. The sun was shining gloriously, the wind blew freshly, and the sea was sufficiently agitated to fill the ear with a pleasant murmur. A single vessel, with all its sails spread, was bearing away in the far distance. Many thoughts, tender and sad and strange, rushed upon me as I surveyed this scene. Little more than twelve months ago I passed some weeks on this same coast, with my

father—at Scarborough. In less than two months how the scenes of life had been shifted for me ! My old home had become desolate ; only yesterday I entered, for the first time, the home of relations whose very existence was unknown to me ; and to-day, I was bound on this singular errand. Amidst many thoughts, this also occurred—that Mr. Osborne formed the one link that, for me, connected this present with the past.

“ I was roused by the carriage stopping. We got out, and Mr. Rycroft ordered the man to drive home, as he intended to walk back. I, carrying my parcel, followed Mr. Rycroft, who struck across a piece of waste ground to which the tide seemed to come up, for it was interlaced with sea-weed. I looked before us, and saw no sign of a human habitation ; but a ridge of rocks terminating in a bold headland, whose base was washed by the sea-waves, intercepted our view.

“ ‘ That’s Hallett’s place,’ said Mr. Rycroft, pointing towards this rocky ridge ; ‘ that’s his stronghold, from which he cannot be dislodged, confound him ! You may see the smoke curling up there, among the crags. When he first came to these parts he found a cavern there

and burrowed in it for some time with his wife and child. Then he set to work and constructed a sort of house. He did it all with his own hands, and you'll find it a rough place. I hope nobody's got there before us.'

"As he spoke, I discovered this rude habitation. A low, but very substantial wall, built of blocks of grey-stone of all shapes and sizes, ran in front of it. Within a few feet of this wall stood the dwelling-house, equally rough and strong, and evidently built by the same hand. The small, deep-set windows, shewed the immense thickness of the walls. The roof, sloping down from a lower projection of the sheltering rocks, was covered with peat-moss that seemed to flourish, for it had spread beyond its original bounds; and hung in broad patches over the eaves. It looked altogether an antiquated place; I should have guessed that it had been built two or three centuries ago.

"Mr. Rycroft was the first to enter the low, open doorway. A descent of two steps led to the interior. Before I had time to notice anything else, my attention was arrested by seeing Charles Trevor, in his shirt-sleeves, kneeling before a stick fire, and blowing with all his might, in order to spread the refractory flame that

flickered apparently amid wet fuel. His cheeks were distended with this operation when he turned his face towards us. I thought that he might not like to be so taken by surprise; but he soon convinced me that he was quite at his ease, and in his element.

“ ‘What the deuce are *you* doing there?’ asked Mr. Rycroft, sharply.

“ ‘I’m making myself useful,’ said Charles, coolly turning to the fire again, after surveying us. ‘If you’ll sit down, Gervase will be here in a minute. He’s with his mother just now. We’re going to cure her between us;’ and he blew at the fire again with all his might.

“ Mr. Rycroft looked at the boy with a malevolent—really a malevolent, scowl on his face. ‘Leave that foolery, and tell the young man he’s wanted,’ he said. ‘I can’t wait here all day.’

“ ‘I’m not about any foolery, and if you can’t wait, I daresay you can go,’ said Charles, pertly. ‘Look here, Miss Moore,’ he continued, turning to me, ‘old Nancy Rutt came in a little while ago, and she looked at Peggy. She brought a bundle of herbs with her, and told me and Gervase to boil them in two quarts of water till the water was reduced to a pint, and then bathe

Peggy's bruises with the lotion. That's what we're going to do. Gervase let the fire go out, and I've just lighted it. Here's the herbs and water, all ready in the pot.'

"The pot, an old-fashioned one with three legs, was swung over the fire by a hook. Experience has taught me to place some little faith in the nostrums of old women, and I felt strongly inclined to induct myself in my new service by helping Charles, who was evidently a bungler at his work. I placed my parcel on a table, threw aside my bonnet and cloak, and advanced to the fire-place.

" 'This will never do, Charles,' I said ; ' we must have more wood or some coal. Have you no coal ?'

"The boy, still on his knees, looked up at me with surprise, ' Yes, there's plenty of coal,' he said.

" ' Then fetch some.'

"He obeyed at once, went out, and returned with a shovel-full. I, in turn, went down on my knees and carefully inserted the bits of coal where the flame of the sticks burnt brightest. My back was towards Mr. Rycroft, so that I could not see how he looked, or what he was doing. Charles Trevor kept at my side.

“ ‘Whoever would have thought of *you* being here?’ he exclaimed. ‘Did you come to see Peggy?’

“ ‘Like you, I came to make myself useful,’ I said; ‘I intend to nurse Peggy till she is well.’

“ ‘Now you’re joking, Miss Moore. You’re not? Then I’ll tell you what, you’re a jolly good soul! I say, Miss Moore’—

“ Here there was an interruption. Mr. Rycroft was knocking loudly against an inner door with his knuckles.

“ ‘You mustn’t make that noise here, Mr. Rycroft,’ said Charles Trevor; ‘Dr. Frank said Peggy was to be kept quiet.’

“ Mr. Rycroft made no reply, but knocked at the door louder than before. Then the door was opened from within.

“ I, still on my knees, holding a piece of coal in one hand, looked up. I beheld a young man apparently about twenty years of age, or perhaps more. He wore such a dress as common sailors wear, but he would have graced any dress, and was certainly independent of any, for he had a fine, manly look, and a certain respectful independence of bearing. It was really a pleasure to look in his face, it was so handsome, so frank and open, so animated and intelligent.

His features were regular ; his eyes large, and of the darkest blue ; his brown hair curled naturally about the most magnificent head I ever saw. This was Peggy Hallett's son, Gervase.

" Mr. Rycroft was the first person he encountered after issuing from the inner room, but catching sight of me he seemed incapable of removing his gaze from me, and I was aware that he was looking at me all the time Mr. Rycroft spoke with him. He was evidently astonished, as he well might be. As Charles Trevor informed me shortly afterwards, I was the only female he had ever seen in his mother's house, with the exception of Nancy Rutt, who shortly before our arrival had come in, but who remained only a few minutes. Here was I making myself quite at home. Mr. Rycroft was in a bad humour, and seemed compelled to vent it upon somebody, for he said,

" ' Young man, I've been kept waiting here a long time, and when people come to help you, you should attend to them. You know who I am, I suppose ? ' I, bestowing all my attention on the fire again, supposed that Gervase bowed in reply to this speech, for he uttered no word.

" ' Very well,' said Mr. Rycroft. ' Here is another disgraceful scene with your parents.

'Your father has again maltreated his wife, for perhaps the hundredth time, and he has seen fit to take himself out of the way. How is your mother? what state is she in — is she quite in her senses? Does she know what she's about?'

" 'I hope so, I do hope that,' said Gervase, speaking with energy.

" 'Well, I can see her, I suppose,' said Mr. Rycroft.

" Gervase said he could see her, and the two walked into the inner room. By this time I had succeeded with the fire, which was beginning to blaze merrily. I rested from my labour and seated myself in a low chair that stood by the hearth, Charles Trevor brought a stool, and placed himself at my side.

" 'And you positively have come to nurse Peggy?' he said, looking up in my face.

" 'Positively.'

" 'And Mr. Rycroft let you come?'

" 'Yes. Does that surprise you?'

" 'It would if I believed it, but I don't, and nobody will. You came in spite of him. You can't say that Mr. Rycroft asked you to come?'

" 'Not exactly. But what does it matter? Here I am.'

“ ‘It matters a good deal. I don’t like Mr. Rycroft, and I want to like you. I should like to see you plague him.’

“ ‘That is wicked of you.’

“ ‘Then I’m wicked in good company. You won’t have pleased Mrs. Rycroft, I know. As for Elizabeth, she’s jolly ; she don’t care for anything. What do you think of Gervase ?’

“ ‘I think him a very fine young man.’

“ ‘Isn’t he ? · Do you know, I always expect people to admire Gervase. I’ve no patience with them that don’t admire him. But everybody doesn’t know him as I do. I know lots of girls, quite well to do, that would jump to have him to-morrow, though he is Dick Hallett’s son ; but he takes no notice of them, except to be civil, as he is with everybody. He’s as steady as the day. He comes up to my idea of a man, and somebody ought to be proud of him, and nobody is except me. We’re fast friends, Miss Moore.’

“ ‘I liked Gervase and Charles Trevor all the better for this friendship between them. The latter evidently made a hero of Gervase, and looked up to and imitated him. Devoted attachments of this kind existed amongst the ancients, and I don’t see why they should not in our day.

It was quite refreshing to me to see how earnest and enthusiastic Charles was while speaking of his friend. In his eagerness he had taken my hand in both his own, and he still held it when Mr. Rycroft and Gervase returned to the room. The eyes of the latter were too expressive to hide from any the pleasure with which he regarded us ; Mr. Rycroft frowned very unmistakeably.

“ ‘ I’ve just been telling this young man, Catherine,’ he said, ‘ of your mad freak. Of course I’ve given him to understand that you’re quite independent of me or anybody, and that you will have your own way. He understands that you’ve always taken to this sort of thing ; that it’s your hobby. He’s very thankful, as he ought to be ; and I trust that you’ll find him perfectly respectful. That is the least return he can make to a born lady who condescends as you are doing.’ ”

“ A certain flash in the eyes of Gervase, warned me that both Mr. Rycroft and myself might presently be shewn to the door. Mr. Rycroft was coming out too strongly in his own way. His speech was a little startling to myself, though I had expected that he would go on this tack. It roused me too, for I was not altogether Mr. Rycroft’s tool in this matter. I was in earnest, and

claimed the right of proceeding in my own way.

“‘It will be time enough to expect thanks when I have earned them,’ I said; ‘at present I have done nothing.’

“‘You’ve made a good fire,’ said Charles Trevor.

“‘True; I forgot the fire. How did you find (I could not readily utter the familiar name, ‘Peggy,’ and so hesitated)—Mrs. Hallett?’

“‘Mrs. Hallett!’ said Mr. Rycroft with a disagreeable laugh. ‘I found *Peggy* in a doze. She seems to have been badly beaten, and without doubt Hallett is a brute. If this young man, her son, had been in the way it would not have happened. I must say that for him.’

“Gervase frowned now. In an instant his face was in a blaze; his eyes flashed fire, and he involuntarily clenched his hands. Pray God, I said mentally, that this Hallett prove indeed to be not his father!

“‘Well,’ continued Mr. Rycroft, ‘I suppose I must leave you, Catherine;—you’re quite determined to stop?’

“‘I have no right to force my services upon any one,’ I said. ‘I should like to stop.’ I looked at Gervase as I spoke.

“ ‘ You’re too good and kind, saying that,’ he said. ‘ There’s no words to thank such as you ; but I do thank you with all my soul. I shall be proud to put myself under obligation to you. I can’t say more.’ ”

“ There was no need to say more. It was impossible to look at Gervase without feeling that he would not readily put himself under obligation to any one.

“ ‘ Now young man,’ said Mr. Rycroft, beginning a speech when I thought he was about to make his exit, ‘ there’s one great service my niece has done you to-day, about which nothing has been said. She, a stranger to this part of the country, coming to my house for the first time only yesterday, learning amongst us what your father’s character was, and hearing all about your mother’s habits, and knowing that in consequence women of your own rank in life refused to enter this house in this extremity ; she came forward, fearing nothing ; and now she is here you may have the whole town if you will. All will be ready to follow the example of my niece. She has taken the ban off your house, Gervase Hallett, and it rests with yourselves to keep it off.’ ”

“ I scarcely knew how to take this speech. Seeing that Peggy Hallett had always driven

her neighbours away from her, I did not understand the benefit to her, or any connected with her, of bringing the whole town to the house. Mr. Rycroft, with his habit of boasting, was again, I feared, committing a mistake. I glanced apprehensively at Gervase, and saw that his eyes were filled with tears. He placed his hand before them, as if 'ashamed of exhibiting this emotion. He did not speak.

“‘I knew that this would be the result of my niece coming here,’ continued Mr. Rycroft; ‘if I had not, I should have done my best to keep her away. It isn’t fit that she should be here alone; she hasn’t herself considered that she will require help. I’ll send some one on immediately.’

“I understood the common sense of what Mr. Rycroft said, so far as it concerned myself. I had been quite content to enter upon my task alone, but now the prospect of having another female in the house was every way satisfactory to me. Charles Trevor promised to be a firm ally. He intended to pass the nights with Gervase, so long as Peggy was ill, and I remained there. Before Mr. Rycroft departed, he promised to send provisions for my individual use. When we three were left alone, Charles Trevor said,

‘Now, Miss Moore, you must give your orders. Is there anything I can do for you?’

“‘It is rather early for me to begin giving orders,’ I said, ‘but for the present I recommend you to attend to your brewing on the fire. I think it is near boiling. I must attend to my patient. Perhaps,’ I continued, addressing Gervase, ‘you had better introduce me to your mother when she awakes; it might startle her too much if she found me there unannounced.’

“‘You’ve a kind thought for her,’ said Gervase. ‘She doesn’t notice anything much just now; she’s getting worse in that respect. If she does notice you, Miss Moore, she can only think she’s in heaven, and that an angel’s waiting on her. I’m afraid it’s you that’ll be startled, for she’s sadly disfigured. But you’ll not turn back for that, I know.’

“Gervase spoke with a slight provincial accent, but his language was good, and he did not, like Mrs. Rycroft, commit blunders of grammar. He was so perfectly sincere, so evidently grateful, that I could not quarrel with his poetical flight. I asked what orders the doctor had left as to his mother’s treatment until he saw her again.

“‘He sent a bottle of medicine which she must take every three hours,’ said Gervase. ‘It’s

time she took it now, if she's awake. He told me to give her barley-water if she asked for anything to drink. I made some this morning, and it's in her room.'

" 'That is all I want to know,' I said. 'I'll go, and sit by her, and you may leave her to me.'

"I moved towards the table, on which lay my bonnet, and cloak, and parcel, but Gervase passed me, and took possession of these articles.

" 'You'll allow me to carry these in yonder?' he asked.

"I nodded, and motioned him to go first. In passing, I glanced at Charles Trevor, who, on his part, was lifting the lid of the boiling-pot—perhaps wondering when the two quarts of water would be reduced to a pint. It was strange how familiar I already felt with these two; it seemed to me that I must have known them all my life.

"Entering the inner room noiselessly, I at once glanced towards the bed. I was certainly considerably startled by what I saw. The head of the individual lying there was bandaged with a white cloth; the face was bruised, and considerably swollen; the eyes blackened. Thus distorted, there was something repulsive in the

countenance of the sleeping woman: but a few straggling grey hairs seemed to invest her with a sorrowful human interest. Her hands, large, and gaunt, and hardened by toil; her arms, brown, and withered, and half exposed, also exhibited marks of violence. After a brief survey, I turned my eyes upon Gervase. He only half met my gaze with his own, that was at once expressive of affection, and grief, and indignation, and deep shame. I wished to encourage, and reassure him with my eyes alone, for I did not speak, but I must have succeeded indifferently, for when he regained the outer room, I heard him weep violently.

“As Peggy appeared to be in a deep sleep, I sat down, and employed myself with looking about me. What first struck me in this sleeping room was its great cleanliness. The bed-clothes and furniture were as clean as hands could make them, the slips of carpet looked fresh in their freedom from dust. It was possible to see yourself in whatever in the room was capable of polish—in the old-fashioned chest of drawers, in the three clumsy mahogany chairs, in the fire-irons, and tiny grate, in the ancient and curiously carved oak chest that probably contained Peggy's store of household linen. On a

small three-legged table that stood in the one recess by the fire-place lay a paper case, evidently home-made, and an inkstand with pens. Above it were two shelves filled with books. On the drawers stood a bottle of medicine, a pitcher filled with barley-water, two earthenware cups, and a pewter spoon. On the drawers also lay a book which I opened. It was a volume of Humboldt's Travels, and bore the stamp of a library. In a small recess, apparently made for the purpose, near the bed head, lay a large, old-fashioned Bible. When I add that the inner walls, like those outside, exhibited the rough, unhewn stone, that the ceiling was composed of rafters rudely put together, and that the whole appeared to have been recently white-washed, I have given you a full description of the apartment in which I found myself.

"I have a purpose in describing it thus particularly. There was no litter, no disarrangement anywhere. The same order, and neatness and cleanliness had struck me in the outer room, and I knew it to be a fact that Peggy Hallett had been wronged by those who attributed drunken habits to her. Over this decent home there certainly presided a sober, industrious thoughtful housewife. More than this, seeing

what a fine, spirited, intelligent young man Gervase was ; understanding certainly that Hallett himself was a brute ; it was impossible to avoid believing that the good qualities of the son were chiefly attributable to some strong counteracting influences in the mother. It seemed to me that the two were touchingly associated together in the properties of this little room. The books certainly belonged to Gervase, and he only could find use for that small student-table. That tattered Bible in the recess as unmistakeably appertained to Peggy as did the old carved chest, whose use I had rightly guessed. So feeling and thinking, I began to be greatly interested in my patient on her own account. I got rid of some little trepidation that I had certainly laboured under up to this time. I unconsciously lapsed into an easy frame of mind that made me boldly free with everything about me, as if everything belonged to me. First, thinking of Peggy, I pounced upon her Bible. I read the date of publication, 1673. A fly leaf, three-quarters filled with writing, next attracted my notice. This is what it said :

“ James Rooke, born 1761.

“ Margaret Rooke, born 1764.

“ ‘Theyre children :

“ ‘ James Rooke, born 1783.

“ ‘ Margaret Rooke, born 1785, died 1788.

“ ‘ Amos Rooke, born 1787, died 1793.

“ ‘ Margaret Rooke, born 1790.

“ ‘ Then followed this entry, written in another hand :

“ ‘ James Rooke married Esther Barlow, 1805, and went to America, and died 1812.’

“ This simple record affected me profoundly ; it reminded me of the chapter of Generations, the reading of which always struck a chill to my heart, as showing the nothingness, humanly speaking, of the life we live. But the Rookes were not an extinct race. I recognised the Margaret who was born in 1790 in the Peggy Hallett of to-day. Why was there no further entry ? there was room for it, of her own marriage ; of the birth of her son ?

“ This omission recalled to my mind Dr. Frank’s words when speaking of Gervase. ‘ I do not believe that Peggy is his mother.’ Thinking of this, led me to survey Peggy more intently : and making every allowance for her present disfiguration, I was compelled to come to the conclusion, that at the best of times she could be no more than a great, gaunt, plain,

common-place looking woman. This was no reason why she should not be an energetic and right-principled woman ; but Gervase was so eminently handsome, that I could not suppose he owed his physique to her. She had declared that he was nothing to Richard Hallett. Who then was he ? To whom did he owe the life that had evidently been made so bitter to him ?

“ I inevitably pursued this train of thought. I remembered that I had been sent here by Mr. Rycroft in order to guard a secret that was in Peggy’s keeping. And this secret concerned Miss Osborne, who early in life had disgraced herself.—In what way ? by an unequal marriage, perhaps, which the pride of her family would not allow them to acknowledge. No ; this would not do. If Miss Osborne had ever been married, that fact would have transpired. Besides, Gervase in no way resembled the Osbornes ; his countenance was too open and sunny, his features too delicate, his complexion too fair, to allow of the supposition of his, in any way, belonging to them. But he might altogether resemble his father, and still be— Grace, I am haunted by an idea.

“ I was glancing at the books on the two shelves, noting that history, biography, voyages

and travels greatly predominated amongst them, when a movement in the bed caused me to turn round. Peggy had thrown both arms over her head, and lay with her eyes open. She looked full at me.

“ ‘Water—give me water,’ she gasped.

“ ‘I poured out her medicine and gave it to her, and she drained the cup.

“ ‘ ‘It’s bitter,’ she said ; ‘ bitter, like everything you’ve given me. I’m in the great house, then ?’

“ ‘ ‘You are at home,’ I said ; ‘ you are ill, and I have come to nurse you.’

“ ‘There was something appalling to me in the wild glare of her grey eyes. ‘I’m not mad,’ she said ; ‘ what’s the use of talking to me as if I was mad ? Is that the way you made *her* mad ? What did you bring me here for ? I’ll not see her ; I’ve nowt to say to her. I’ll not bear all the blame. Tell her to fly at the men.’

“ ‘I thought it best to humour her. ‘She shall not come near you,’ I said ; ‘ no one shall disturb you. Try to go to sleep, and I’ll keep you quiet.’

“ ‘ ‘What have you done with him ?’ continued Peggy, still glaring at me in a fearful way. ‘Has

he seen her? Does he take to her? My boy! my boy! she'll never have the mother's heart for you that I've had! You've no right to break yourself clean away from me; it's not like you—it's not true. Good God!' she continued, starting up with fearful energy; 'what have you done with Gervase? Have you murdered him?'

"Forgetful of Mr. Rycroft's injunction in this one respect, I thought it best to let her see Gervase. I was approaching the door with the purpose of calling him, when he opened it and remained standing on the threshold. His countenance had undergone a strange alteration; he was pale as death; he looked eager and determined.

" 'Miss Moore,' he said; 'you'll excuse me, I hope, if now and then I come in to speak to my mother. She's getting worse, I think; she's talking wildly, but not without sense. I'm glad you're here to listen to what she says.'

"I said that I was just about to call him; but I don't think he heard me. He was already at his mother's side, holding her hand, speaking endearing words to her.

" 'They've not been able to harden your heart against me, then,' she said, exultingly; 'they

couldn't keep you away from me ! They couldn't persuade you it was all my fault ! As true as there's a God in heaven, Gervase, it wasn't ! They wouldn't let me know the rights of it, but I guessed, I guessed !'

" 'What is it you guessed, mother ? speak quietly—tell me ?'

" 'All about that,' said Peggy ; 'what you heard up-stairs. How did she look ? Did she tell you she wasn't mad ? What right have you to hunt Richard Hallett like a wild beast, because he fell into temptation ?' she added, suddenly flinging the hand of Gervase away from her.' 'You are a gentleman now, are you, and you must punish somebody ? Didn't Richard and me take care of you when nobody else would ? What did you bring me here for ? What have you done with my husband ? He'd have been a good husband if it hadn't been for you !'

" 'Mother ! mother !' said Gervase, seizing her hand again and grasping it firmly, 'do you at all know what you are saying ? Am I not Gervase, your own son ?'

" 'Hush ! she'll hear you,' said Peggy, glancing apprehensively around her. Her eyes fell upon me. 'That one will tell !' I drew back

and hid myself behind the bed-curtains. 'Who taught you to say, mother? didn't I? you have no mother. They may give you money, but a mother—never!'

"'No father, no mother—both lost in one day,' said Gervase, dropping the hand he held, and standing moodily with his arms folded; 'disgrace any way! Your coming here gladdened me just now, Miss Moore, but that was because I was a fool. I ought to be ashamed to look any one in the face!'

"He moved towards the door, but Peggy uttered a scream, and he stopped without turning back.

"'Who spoke of disgrace?' she exclaimed; 'there's no disgrace to my boy! He was born in wedlock—tell Mr. Rycroft that, and let him deny it if he can! He did deny it for his own ends; but that's past. He's a black villain that has tried to crush them that will crush him!'

"It was my turn to quail now, which I did with a mental reservation. I did not hold myself accountable for Mr. Rycroft's misdeeds; I wished to reassure Gervase. I placed my hand on his arm, looked up in his face, and said—

"'We are on an equality now, my friend; if you are disgraced, I am. But I am not—neither

are you ; what we heard just now is at present a blank to both of us. Let us patiently wait and watch.'

" His face had brightened wonderfully when he lifted his bowed head and looked at me. 'I was not mistaken when I thought God had sent you to us,' he said ; ' may God bless you !' I shut the door on him, and turned to Peggy.

" She had evidently exhausted herself, and now lay dozing again ; and she was in this state when Dr. Frank came in, an hour afterwards. He expressed no surprise at seeing me there, having heard, he said, ' that I was in the habit of going out nursing.' He joked a little, saying he should be glad to recommend me, and so forth. In the midst of this pleasantry, I could not help fancying that a covert meaning lurked in his smile, and in the look with which he regarded me. It was not altogether a coward conscience that made me suppose he had recognised me in my character of spy. He had been witness to Mr. Rycroft's agitation ; he must have noticed how eager the latter was to have the woman attended by a nurse of his own providing. Under these circumstances, Dr. Frank probably did not give credit to the assertion that I had seen some service in this same way. I began

to perceive that I was placed in an unpleasant predicament ; that Peggy herself, who decidedly disliked me now, understanding by some instinct that I was connected with 'the great house,' would, on recovering her senses, at once rightly guess one reason for my taking upon myself such an office. Even Gervase might be led to suspect that he had been too lavish of his gratitude. Confess that I had good reason for these misgivings, Grace ; and give me credit for possessing some moral courage when I tell you, that, falling back upon my own good intentions, I felt nerved to go through my task with courage and becoming self-respect.

"I was the more annoyed at appearing in this dubious light before Dr. Frank, because I felt sure that he was himself a kind-hearted, genial, sensible man ; a promoter of cheerfulness and candour, and a hater of mysteries and concealments of any kind. I could not tell him that I felt out of my element. 'He that touches pitch must expect to be defiled.'

"After looking at Peggy, and saying that leeches must be applied to her head, which had been seriously injured, Dr. Frank informed me that a professional nurse would shortly make her

appearance, and take the heaviest work off my hands.

“ ‘You must not allow us to forget your own readiness to work alone,’ he continued ; ‘ it is a fact, that if you had not set the example, we should have found it difficult to procure help. You, as a stranger, do not understand what a terrible reputation attaches to this house, on account of its master, of course. He is a ruffian. Peggy is a patient, down-beaten woman ; and you see what Gervase is—as fine a fellow as ever lived. These two will be grateful to you, I expect ; you will have done them a service.’ ”

“ I felt as grateful to Dr. Frank for saying this, as if I had indeed committed some great offence, for which I was now receiving pardon. If he suspected any interested motive, he evidently exonerated me. I cannot tell you how great a satisfaction this was to me.

“ ‘ We must still look to you for help,’ continued Dr. Frank ; ‘ you alone can keep this woman’s wavering courage up to the mark. Knowing that you were here, she offered to come readily, but she still protests herself to be in bodily fear of Hallett. He is at large, and she thinks that he may make his appearance here. There is no need for alarm on his ac-

count. Two stout constables will be near at hand during the night, and if he makes his appearance, he'll be captured. But he is conscious of the predicament in which he has placed himself, and I expect he has made off.'

"Gervase appeared at the door, to ask the doctor what he thought of his mother, and by a simultaneous movement, we all presently found ourselves in the kitchen.

" 'Oh,' said Dr. Frank, leading the way for me (I seemed to follow his kind, cheery voice, as if I couldn't help it), 'I've no doubt about getting her through—we must have patience.'

"Charles Trevor was still hanging over that pot, on the fire.

" 'Charley, my boy,' said the doctor, plucking him by his shirt sleeves, 'you're in excellent working trim—what are you about?'

"Charley explained, and I inquired if the lotion would be of any use.

" 'Make use of it, by all means,' said Dr. Frank, 'I don't object to the remedies of old women, being a sort of old woman myself. But the fact is, Nancy Rutt is clever in her way; she understands the properties of herbs, and I daresay, that for external bruises, no application could be better than this. But there's not much

of it,' he added, looking in the pot. 'In fact, there's nothing of it.'

"In fact, there was nothing of it. Charles seemed to have expected that the great bundle of herbs would dissolve before his eyes; and while waiting for this phenomena, he had allowed the water to boil away, and now the whole had turned to a fry. Charles looked very blank.

" 'You need have some women about you, I think,' said Dr. Frank, laughing. 'Never mind, you'll do better next time. Go to Nancy for more herbs, and tell her I sent you.'

"I took a good share of the blame to myself, as was only right. So far, I had not shown much capacity for the work I had undertaken. Gervase allowed the blame to rest where we two had put it, for he did not speak, but paced to and fro in an evident state of excitement.

" 'You do think, sir,' he said, stopping suddenly before Dr. Frank, 'that what my mother says in this disordered state is not all delusion? you believe there may be truth in it?'

" 'Certainly. If she has anything on her mind that she has never revealed, it is likely enough to come out now. So you're thinking of what she said this morning;—has she repeated that?'

“ ‘No. Just now she fancied that I was about to do *him* some injury, and she took his part. She threw on me the blame of making him what he is. She’s troubled with all kinds of fancies. You see, sir, there’s no depending on what she says.’

“ ‘You understand your own feelings best, Gervase,’ said Dr. Frank. ‘I can’t wonder at your wishing that some of her words may come true. But don’t get excited about it; keep as quiet as you can; and don’t trouble her till she is quite well.’

“I noticed that Gervase did not mention to Dr. Frank the fact of Peggy having also said that he had no mother. It evidently was not his mother that he wished to lose, and this also spoke well for her. Amongst other things, I began to perceive that with Gervase on the alert as he was to catch whatever she might utter in her delirium, I should have little opportunity of keeping anything to myself. Besides, if I find good reason to believe that any wrong has been committed, I shall openly take the part of the injured.

“ ‘Before Dr. Frank quitted us the nurse arrived, and he introduced her to me as Mrs. Byers. She made me a very sweeping curtsey,

and evidently regarded me with a species of wonder. From her manner, and what she said, I understood that she looked up to Mr. Rycroft with considerable awe, as a very great personage, and that she was in the habit of making as free with Dr. Frank as if he were indeed the old woman he had lately called himself. He appears, indeed, to be one of those good-natured, good-tempered individuals, at once hearty and easy, with whom all sorts of people take all sorts of liberties. She rated him soundly for not having called that morning on a certain Mrs. Pitt, and told him he must call before going home. This he promised to do, and took leave. Gervase went out at the same time to fetch the leeches; Charles Trevor had already departed on his errand to Nancy Rutt.

“I was left alone with Mrs. Byers. She was an ordinary woman, perhaps fifty-five years of age. Her manner with me, humble to abjectness, would have been more offensive than it was, if I had not understood that it was the result of a system organised long before she or I were heard of. According to this system, worldly prosperity receives the first homage, setting aside God himself, and what is noblest in the nature of man. Mrs. Byers recognised in me a reflection

of Mr. Rycroft's greatness. This was a mistake, and the system abounds in worse mistakes. What was more natural in Mrs. Byers, was scarcely more pleasant to me. I have often noticed in ignorant persons a passion for making the worst of what is already bad enough, for heaping horror upon horror's head. This passion was very rampant in Mrs. Byers, who voluntarily commenced an account of the past doings of Richard Hallett, and his wife also, that elevated or lowered them to the position of a couple of fiends. I at length stopped these details, that, allowing for their exaggeration, were anything but encouraging to me; but I must have done this in a sort of way that proved to her I had a certain kind of yielding about me of which she was ready enough to take advantage, for she finally invited me to inspect the ordinary bedroom of the two Halletts, all the furniture of which she assured me had been smashed to atoms during the quarrel of the preceding night. Where she got this information I could not guess, unless from Dr. Frank himself, who might be something of a gossip. She first made me aware that a lodging-room similar to that now occupied by Peggy, lay on the opposite side of the kitchen. This was the room in which the work

of destruction had taken place, and which I declined to see.

“ Mrs. Byers, who at first showed considerable reluctance to enter Peggy’s room, and who when there could not conceal her dislike, applied the leeches when they arrived, requiring little help from me. She made me aware of the extent of Peggy’s bruises ; and surely a more savage attack was never made by man upon woman. Well might Gervase cling to the hope that he did not owe his being to such a monster ; well might Mrs. Byers dread being brought into personal contact with him. Fortunately while being thus attended upon, Peggy did not speak, but only gave utterance to groans. She has not spoken yet, and it is long past midnight, and I have been for hours alone with her. Mrs. Byers has made me up a bed with the help of three chairs ; she has lighted a fire in the small grate, and supplied me with coals to replenish it. I have drawn the table before it, and by the aid of an old-fashioned oil lamp, I have for two hours or more been engaged in writing this letter to you. From the inner room comes to me the hurr of voices, for Gervase, Charles Trevor, and Mrs. Byers are all sitting up, the latter having declared that she could not think of sleeping in

this house during the night. Imagine me being in this situation on the second night of my arrival amongst my kindred !

“ I said to you a little while back that an idea had struck me ; it is this—that Gervase is Miss Osborne’s son. Did not the same thought occur to you ? For my part I give credit to all that Peggy has uttered. I believe that in her young days Miss Osborne was married, and that she has been harshly treated by her family—a proud family, as Mr. Rycroft said. I do not sympathise with the sort of pride that is here presented to me ; I understand that unequal marriages must always be productive of sorrow, but only when the inequality is of heart and mind. I fear I have lost my respect for Mr. Osborne, and this grieves me, for I have been accustomed to think of him with pleasure, as I do of all who command my admiration and esteem. I lose sight of his generosity ; his tenderness of heart ; his faithfulness and liberality, and splendid talents, when I consider the existence of so much misery and wrong in his own family, with his knowledge or without it. If he does not understand all the particulars, if he also is wronged, I still do not excuse him. Why does he not sometimes reside here, where all his estates lie ? Why does his

sister dread to meet him, fearing his harshness ? What is the disgrace he could not forgive even in presence of this great sorrow ? You see, Grace, that I must give Mr. Osborne up ; before I take him into favour again (don't laugh, for I am very serious) he must exercise his humanity at home.

“ And the Rycrofts, whom he evidently trusts so much ; what am I to think of them ? or what may *he* think of them eventually ? What may he think of me as one of them if brought into contact with me here ? All these thoughts disturb me, Grace, but I have no idea at present of soon returning to you. I imagine that I can be of use here. I intend to devote myself to the elucidation of some of these mysteries. I shall try to sleep now, so good night !

“ Your affectionate cousin,

“ CATHERINE MOORE.”

CHAPTER VII.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

"I WILL now continue my narrative from where I left off.

"Though I lay down without taking my clothes off, I must have slept many hours, for when I awoke it was daylight. Mrs. Byers was in the room cleaning up the hearth, or I might have slept on. I started up, mentally reproaching myself, for I had not intended to neglect my charge so long. I asked Mrs. Byers if Peggy had been awake, for she slept now, and if she had spoken.

" 'Shoo's been wakken, but shoo said nowt only to ask for drink,' said Mrs. Byers ; ' shoo's ta'en her physic too, and'll be on the mend now. Shoo'll be weak an' sore for a good bit, but t' fever's left her, you may see.'

"I did see that the swelling and redness of

the face had been considerably reduced, and that in this state Peggy was more awful to look at than ever. Her plain, gaunt features were beginning to stand sharply out, and the marks of the blows were now clearly to be traced in broad patches of black, and purple, and yellow. What was to be seen of her throat and arms exhibited the same appearance; and she looked to me like an exhumed corpse, just merging into putrefaction. I turned my eyes away with a shudder, and met those of Mrs. Byers.

“ ‘It’s not a sight for decent folks, let alone the like of you, mum,’ she said. ‘Such as her should be waited on by them of their own sort, I’m thinking. Owt’s too good for ’em.’

“ ‘I was not sure that Peggy slept, though she lay so still, and I made a sign for Mrs. Byers to be silent. When she had finished what she was about, I followed her into the kitchen, shutting the bedroom door behind me.

“ ‘Now, Mrs. Byers,’ I said, ‘you must not speak in that way again before Peggy, nor behind her back if you can help it. I hope you don’t hurt her son’s feelings by making such remarks before him. It is sufficient hardship for the two to have a bad husband and father. Mr. Rycroft and Dr. Frank believe her to be a

well-conducted, respectable woman. I believe this, or I should not be here. You will remember to treat her as such, if you please.'

"The habitual submission of Mrs. Byers to 'the like' of such as me, rather than any conviction that I was right, induced her to promise obedience to this order. Dropping her usual curtesy, she said she should be sorry to throw blame where there was none; and, to be sure, Peggy was an ill-used woman, if what was said of her was untrue. As for Gervase, she allowed that no one could bear a better character, and she wouldn't hurt his feelings for the world.

"Gervase came in while we were speaking. He saluted me respectfully, hoped I had obtained some rest, and then went to look at his mother. He returned presently, his eyes filled with tears.

" 'I wish Dr. Frank would come,' he said; 'I can't think that my mother is better. She's awake, but too weak to speak. You're not deceiving me, Mrs. Byers?—she's not dying?'

" 'Lord bless the lad!' exclaimed Mrs. Byers, 'much he knows about dying folk! She's no more dying nor I am.'

" 'She's been a good mother to me,' said Gervase, looking reassured, 'and I should not

like her to die in this way. I very much wish her to live, and know what you've done for her, Miss Moore. She deserves to do, and that's saying a great deal.'

" 'And she will,' I said, cheerfully; 'and I trust that she and I will always be good friends.'

" I cannot tell you how pleased and grateful Gervase looked. He is no ordinary character. His fine eyes and handsome, open countenance are wonderfully expressive of the noblest sentiments. As he went out, I was startled by detecting a really malignant look on the face of Mrs. Byers. There is one very ugly characteristic amongst the ignorant poor: they readily become envious, when help that does not reach them is extended to any of their class. It was this species of jealousy that brought out the repulsive look on the face of Mrs. Byers. It was a fit accompaniment to her servility. I do not like her.

" I had made myself fit to receive company by the time Dr. Frank arrived. I was glad to hear him confirm the report of Mrs. Byers respecting Peggy's progress, for I had had my own doubts.

" 'Oh, we shall do very well now,' said the doctor, surveying his patient. 'She couldn't be

in better hands than yours, Miss Moore, and I shall leave her to you. Give her some nourishing food, and keep her quiet. You feel better—eh, Peggy? (her eyes were open, and she was looking alternately at me and the doctor). Well, never mind talking; you'll be all right in a few days.'

" 'I wish you would see Gervase before you go, Dr. Frank,' I said. 'He is somewhere close hand, I believe, and he has been very anxious about his mother. He will be better satisfied if he sees you; he was wishing just now that you would come.'

"I saw that Peggy regarded me with an eager look as I spoke. It was a look that expressed satisfaction—thankfulness. She was evidently conscious of what had been said.

"Dr. Frank promptly promised to see Gervase, though to do that was no part of his professional duty. I could not help laughing afterwards, when I reflected on what I had said. Here was I, like every one else, taking liberties with Dr. Frank—positively imposing on his good nature already! There is no help for it, I believe; it seems to be his destiny to be so treated.

"I followed him out of the room, and he gave Mrs. Byers and myself some instructions as to Peggy's further treatment. I forgot to tell you

that yesterday we were visited by one of Mr. Rycroft's footmen, who came laden with a basket of provisions, and who delivered to me an ill-spelt note from Mrs. Rycroft, in which she called me a 'dear, *hod* girl;' desired me to send for anything I wanted; and altogether made light of my oddity, as something exceedingly amusing. I was glad that she took it in this way, for whatever reason. Amongst other things, this basket contained two bottles of sherry and some arrowroot, and these I set aside for Peggy's use. I made some of the arrowroot at once, and then returned to my post, leaving Mrs. Byers to attend to the ordinary work of the house.

"Peggy readily received from my hands whatever I offered her; and when I bathed her bruises with Nancy Rutt's lotion, I felt sure that she thanked me with her eyes. Her eyes followed me, when, presently discovering that Mrs. Byers was not quite so tidy a housewife as herself, I got possession of a duster, and commenced polishing up the little room, that had already lost much of its original brightness. I even rubbed the four little panes of glass that comprised the window, for there was a look about them of being used to expect that operation daily. When this work was finished, I put more coal on the fire, washed

my hands, took one of Gervase's books from the shelf, and sat down to read.

" 'Now is Peggy wondering who the deuce I am ! ' I said to myself.

" About half an hour afterwards (so my watch informed me), I was startled by the discovery that my eyes were fixed upon a book which lay open before me, which I grasped with one hand, while my cheek rested on the other. I had evidently fallen into a reverie over this book, for I had not turned a single leaf. I involuntarily turned my eyes to Peggy, who was awake, and still regarding me intently.

" ' Now is Peggy wondering what I am thinking about ! ' I said to myself again.

" In truth, I had been thinking of many matters, amongst others this : that I, who had so far passed through life without incurring (so I flattered myself) the dislike, much less the enmity of any, was now likely enough to find myself become obnoxious to all about me, through having thus allowed myself to be strangely mixed up and associated with the secrets and disputes of three distinct families—the Osbornes, the Rycrofts, and the Halletts. I was too nearly allied to one of them to be trusted by the other two ; I sympathised too little with

the one to hope to be strengthened by the alliance. At the same time that I felt this, I was conscious of a resolution to go on, that I certainly had not arrived at by any effort of my own. I seemed to be falling readily into a place previously assigned for me, in which I might do some good to others, whatever befell myself. And whatever does befall myself, I shall have left the consciousness of having wished, hoped, laboured for what is right.

“Peggy was now convalescent and composed, and I wondered whether Mr. Rycroft, knowing this, would consider that my task was ended, and so wish to remove me. If that was the case, I intended to resist. I had made up my mind to remain with Peggy until she was able to help herself. I would not leave her to the tender mercies of Mrs. Byers, who, acting under the constraint of my presence, and, perhaps in the hope of ingratiating herself with me, making use of more sympathising words than seemed needful, yet could not conceal her dislike to the object of her services, which peeped out in many ways. If she had occasion to touch her, she did it roughly, causing, as it seemed to me, a needless spasm of pain to pass over the poor, patient face; if she offered her anything, she was impa-

tient to get that duty over. Peggy herself noticed all this, and presently she would take nothing except from my hand. I certainly shall remain here until Peggy is well.

"In the afternoon, I was surprised by a visit from Mr. Rycroft, who unceremoniously ordered Mrs. Byers to leave the kitchen when I entered it. She obeyed, curtseying very humbly. Mr. Rycroft had a look of being much put out of his way.

" 'Well, how do you get on?' he asked abruptly.

" 'Better than I expected,' I said, getting at once on the wrong tack. 'She is quite composed to-day, and I think will soon be well.'

" 'What is her getting well to me?' said Mr. Rycroft, impatiently; 'is the girl mad? Has she said anything to you or anybody?'

"I was conscious of reddening violently, for Mr. Rycroft's manner was exceedingly disagreeable to me. He perceived this, and added, 'I am just worried to death, Catherine; you must not mind my seeming a little rough. I only want you to recollect why you came here.'

"I then repeated to him all that I had heard Peggy say; adding that Gervase had heard it also.

“ ‘The old fool !’ said Mr. Rycroft. ‘And what did you make out of all that trash? Come; speak freely.’

“ ‘I certainly thought that Peggy supposed herself to be at Staunton Court, and that the person she alluded to as not being mad was Miss Osborne. The idea she left upon my mind was that Miss Osborne had been married, and that Gervase was her son.’

“ Mr. Rycroft very visibly became a shade paler.

“ ‘And that lad,’ he said; ‘I suppose he thought the same?’

“ ‘No; Gervase could make nothing of what his mother said. He attached no importance to it, seeing that she was delirious.’

“ ‘He showed some sense, then,’ said Mr. Rycroft. ‘You, Catherine, may think yourself very sharp, but you are altogether in the wrong; some day I may give you the facts. You kept these fancies to yourself, I hope?’

“ ‘I did, of course.’

“ ‘That old virago is getting well, you say. What does she say, now she knows what she’s about?’

“ I told him that as yet she did not seem capable of speaking.

“ ‘It would be a good thing if she never spoke any more,’ said Mr. Rycroft; ‘in the absence of Hallett, she’s not to be trusted. That chicken-hearted fool has gone out of the way, and isn’t to be found. Some day he’s sure to murder her, and it’s a pity he hasn’t done that long ago. Does she know who you are?’

“ ‘No.’

“ ‘Then take care that she does know; and when she can speak, if she has anything particular to say, she may say it to you. Tell her from me that if her husband loses my favour, through her conduct or his own, he is ruined. There is no reaching these people’s consciences except through their interests. I wish this matter concerned myself; I’d soon make short work of it, Catherine. You see what I’m compelled to endure through troubling myself about other people; but I’ve promised—I’ve promised, and I must go through with it.’

“ Mr. Rycroft seemed so sincere, there was such a genuine air of martyrdom about him when he said this, that I felt staggered. Perhaps, after all, he was not meditating any wrong, but was merely anxious, as he said, to save a great family from disgrace. However I put it, it was evident that unpardonable blame lay somewhere.

“ ‘ You have behaved excellently in this matter, Catherine,’ he said, at length, ‘ and I shall not forget that you have tried to serve me. I think I have the power to help them that help me, eh?—well, you shall see. I don’t know that you could have done anything better to begin with than come here. It has roused people’s curiosity ; everybody is talking about you ; and all allow that you must be very brave as well as good, and—and condescending. Mrs. Rycroft sees it all in the proper light, and she is pleased. Well, now, you understand. If you can get anything out of this woman do, and let me know what it is ; above all, don’t forget to warn her, as I told you.’ ”

“ There was something particularly offensive to me in the whole of this speech. It did not seem necessary that there should be any misunderstanding between me and Mr. Rycroft.

“ ‘ I came here of my own free will,’ I said, ‘ supposing from what I heard that I should be doing a service to this poor woman and yourself also. I did not dream of reward beyond the approbation of my own heart, or such thanks as I may be entitled to ; I must not forfeit this sole reward to which I look. I must be as perfectly open with Peggy Hallett as I am with

yourself ; I cannot attempt to drag anything out of her in an underhand way. I am here to help her, to warn her, if necessary ; I have been led to believe that my interference may avert possible calamity that threatens her and others. Let me clearly understand what I am about, and I shall hope to give you satisfaction.'

" Mr. Rycroft said, very briefly, that he admired my spirit, and that I understood what he meant exactly. He asked me if I wanted anything that he could send. I said I did not ; desired him to give my love to Mrs. Rycroft and Elizabeth, and he departed.

" At nightfall I had a little talk with Charles Trevor in the kitchen ; Gervase was out. These two had all day been at work in an outhouse, engaged in putting together, as well as they could, the furniture that Hallett had done his best to reduce to fragments. So far they had succeeded very well, Charles said, and they expected to finish the next day. Gervase was very anxious to make everything look right before his mother got about again. This also spoke well for the mother and son. Mrs. Byers, who knew, had not informed me what the two boys were about all day. When I said that it was very good and thoughtful of Gervase, she

launched out into extravagant praises, but still with that disagreeable look on her face. If Gervase had been doing anything wrong, I fancy that she would have told me readily.

“Towards midnight I began to feel a little troubled about Mrs. Byers, who had sat up all the preceding night, and who might not be able to find a bed if she was disposed to sleep. I, who had slept so far into the morning, now felt so wakeful that I had made up my mind to sit up and read. For several hours Mrs. Byers might sleep in my bed, where she would at least be as safe as myself. I went into the kitchen, and made this proposal to her; she and Gervase, and Charles Trevor, were seated round the fire. Gervase said at once that there were two beds unoccupied, one being in a room formed out of a natural opening in the rock; so that during the day it only received light through the door. Mrs. Byers, in a whining tone (she had risen from her chair, and made her accustomed curtsy, and I had some trouble to make her sit down again), said it was very good of the like of me thinking of such as she was; but she couldn’t make up her mind to go regularly to bed—she couldn’t help feeling scared!

“‘Then, old lady,’ said Charles Trevor, ‘I

hope you'll be able to dispense with my company; for I've made up my mind to go to bed regularly.'

"Gervase hastened to say that he intended to sit up until his mother was quite recovered. Gervase has more than one characteristic of a true gentleman about him: he is always unselfish and courteous. After this, Mrs. Byers proceeded to say that she could sleep in her chair as well as anywhere else; that she did not mind it; that she was used to it. As she was used to it, I thought it would not hurt her; and so this matter ended.

"My own private opinion respecting Peggy during that day and part of the night was, that she could speak, and would not—as she might have groaned in the midst of her great pain, and would not. Suffering as she does—so that when she is moved, or she moves herself voluntarily, her features are contracted with the pain she endures — not the slightest sound ever escapes her lips. She is evidently strong to endure, as one used to endurance; there may be questions that she dreads to ask; she is certainly wondering where I sprang from. I shall be curious to hear what words she utters first.



“I read till late in the morning, and then had a brief sleep. I awoke before Mrs. Byers came into the room, and Peggy seemed to be sleeping. This morning I was struck with a new change in her. The swelling and inflammation had entirely disappeared, and now I discovered that she had no flesh. Her eyes were deep sunk below a projecting forehead; her high cheek-bones, and large nose and chin, stood sharply out. Her skin was wrinkled, her face marked with strong lines, that seemed to have been the work of sorrow rather than time. No better proof than this that Peggy possesses a true woman’s heart—she has suffered deeply. When I add, that the marks of the blows and the discolouration were more visible than ever, you may imagine how Peggy looked. I shall, perhaps, weary you with my minuteness. At about ten o’clock I heard Gervase speaking in the kitchen; he and Charles Trevor had gone out early. I knew that he would wish to see his mother; and, as she had not yet spoken, I thought it would be as well that he should try to rouse her. I entered the kitchen and exchanged a few words with him, and then he went into the room. As he left the door half-open, I advanced to shut it; but in doing so,

lingered a few seconds. I heard Gervase say, 'My dear mother!' and then Peggy exclaimed, in tones of startling energy, 'Where is HE?' I shut the door. Her first thought was for her husband. I remembered what Dr. Frank had said about her devotion as a wife, and felt that he was most probably correct in judging as he did. If so, what influence this man must have over her! what she must suffer, loving him, and knowing him to be a villain! especially if she is conscious of abetting him in some villany by her silence or otherwise, and against her conscience: Peggy may well have those deep lines in her face. Gervase remained with his mother a long time—until Dr. Frank arrived. The latter met Gervase as he was coming out of the room.

" 'You've said nothing to her about that?' asked the Doctor, in a whisper.

" 'Nothing,' said Gervase.

" 'I had already informed the Doctor that Peggy had recovered her speech. He smiled as if he thought that likely enough. I went into the room with Dr. Frank.

" 'Good morning, Peggy,' he said; 'I'm paying you a friendly visit, so you must take it kind of me; for I've no hope of keeping you on my

list as a patient. There's nothing like good nursing for cutting down a doctor's bill, and you've had the best of nurses, I can see. It's well for me, Miss Moore, that you're not in the profession, or I might turn to some other line as soon as I liked. You're looking quite brisk, as if you'd passed your time pleasantly—satisfactorily I should say; not at all tired.'

" 'I have not done anything to tire me,' I said; 'and everything has gone on well, as you see. Here are plenty of books, and I like reading. I seem to have done little else except read and write.'

" 'She's waited upon me as if I had been her mother,' said Peggy.

" 'To be sure she has,' said Dr. Frank. 'This is the sort of works she likes. And you may think yourself honoured, Peggy, in getting Miss Moore all to yourself directly on her arrival amongst us, for no one else has yet had a sight of her. So be a good woman, Peggy, and get well as soon as you can, for Miss Moore is wanted in other places, I can tell you.'

" 'Those who want me elsewhere can well wait,' I said; 'but it's gratifying to hear that I am so much in request. At present I have no

thought of giving up my very comfortable quarters here.'

" 'Well, it is a very snug little place, isn't it?' said Dr. Frank, rubbing his hands as he looked round the room. 'One couldn't call it a bad world if one had only such a home as this to put one's head in. I could put that fire, grate and all, in my pocket; but what a jolly little fire it is! It makes more noise than a big one, just as a little wife does.'

"Dr. Frank had seated himself beside this fire. I could not help looking admiringly in his kind face, lighted up by the most genial of smiles. What a happy feeling it is to be thus attracted towards a fellow mortal! Peggy, who was looking at both of us, said,

" 'This is a good world after all; goodness thrives in it.'

"She did not address herself to us; she spoke as if communing with herself.

" 'Don't you flatter yourself that you've stumbled on a discovery, Peggy,' said Dr. Frank. 'Goodness is a trifle older than the hills, and there never was a time in which it didn't thrive everywhere. We're told that the Devil goes about sowing tares, but there's always them at his heels, that take care the original crop is not

spoiled. That's my creed, Peggy ; and it has always made me feel very comfortable.'

" 'It's good,' said Peggy ; 'it's hopeful, and the best of us has need of hope.'

" 'You're a sensible woman, Peggy,' said the Doctor. 'The best of us (I'm not one of them by a very long chalk) have reason to hope that the evil hasn't overrun all the good in them. The fact is (I believe I was talking about running at the Devil's heels just now, Peggy) the fact is, we had better keep ahead of the Devil ; and civilly declining his intentions, recommend him to pave hell with them. There is a saying that that disreputable quarter is paved with much better. And this saying means, Peggy, that when we resolve to do well, and falter, and lose the opportunity, the Devil is better pleased than if we had served him in the ordinary way. Our ill luck is his good luck. So comes the saying, "Hell is paved with good intentions."'

" 'And so it is,' said Peggy ; 'and so it is ! I've been helping to pave it all my life.'

" 'We've all of us lent a helping hand in our time,' said Dr. Frank. 'But it's dirty work, and profitless work, and we that tire of better work should tire of that. But what a grave discourse we've got into,' and I've a dozen

patients waiting for me! You'll allow me to look in again, Peggy, while Miss Moore stops, and perhaps afterwards ?'

" 'I'll be glad and proud to see you, sir, whenever you like to come,' said Peggy.

" 'Well, that's hearty,' said Dr. Frank ; 'and I'll be as sure to come as a new moon or a comet.'

" And so he left us. As Peggy had begun to converse, I did not intend to let her relapse into silence.

" 'Dr. Frank is certainly a very kind, sensible man,' I said. 'I think we shall both be the better for seeing more of him.'

" 'He's good, I can see that,' said Peggy ; 'and you're good. So much goodness is a wonder to me.'

" 'Yet it would be sad indeed if there was really anything wonderful in it, Mrs. Hallett, (I could not say 'Peggy,' for the life of me). In this world we should be ready to help one another ; God expects it of us. This is the one duty that must not be neglected if we hope for pardon and peace. It is so written, as you know. The inevitable sorrow and suffering of this life in time demands that it should be so.'

" 'I've read about it,' said Peggy ; 'but that's not like meeting with it. And I never met with

it till now. You'll not take it ill of me if I lie and think a bit, will you? I've need to think before I say much.'

" 'Pray do as you like,' I said, 'and never mind me. You have need of rest, and of food too, which I am forgetting.'

"I gave her some arrowroot; and then thinking it best to leave her alone awhile, I put on my bonnet and went outside for a breath of fresh air. It was a dull day, but very calm, and I strolled down to the beach. Presently I was spied out by Gervase and Charles Trevor, with whose help I climbed to the top of the highest cliff. When I returned to the house, much refreshed, the early dinner was ready; and after attending to Mrs. Hallett (as I had better name her in the future for my own convenience' sake), I partook of it, and then settled myself down to read. I regretted that I had not brought some needlework with me, for try as I would to fix my attention, I could not. My thoughts wandered, and I turned over the pages mechanically. At length Peggy said, 'Would you mind reading a bit to me? There's only one book I ever turn to, and I've not read it with much profit. You've read it, too, though your need was never like mine.'

“I went to the recess and took out the bible.

“‘Like most who have sorrow to bear, you think your trouble is greater than that of others,’ I said; ‘but there are none who at some time do not feel the need of higher consolation than this world can offer them. The time arrived long ago for me: I have lost father and mother, brother and sisters. I am the sole survivor of a family.’

“Mrs. Hallett looked, I thought, at my black dress.

“‘You’ve just lost one of them,’ she said.

“‘Yes; my father.’

“‘Poor child!—dear child! you’ve had to weep then, but not for your own sinfulness, like me!’ She covered her head with the bed-clothes, and lay moaning. I opened the bible, and selecting the psalms that I thought appropriate to her state of mind, I read on for some time—till she herself stopped me. Raising herself in the bed so that she sat upright, and clasping her withered hands, she said, ‘If there’s truth in that book, and truth in God, speak the truth to me! You’re Mr. Rycroft’s niece; so Gervase said. You didn’t come here only to help me, kind as you’ve been!’

“I closed the bible, rested my hand upon it,

and meeting her earnest look steadily, gave her a faithful account of all the motives for my coming.

“‘Further than this,’ I said in conclusion, ‘I know nothing; but I have been led to suppose much that may be true or not.’

“‘I talked then when I was off my head,’ said Mrs. Hallett. ‘For God’s sake what did I say?’

“‘I told her what Gervase and Mr. Frank had heard her say; all that I had heard.

“‘And Mr. Rycroft knows it?’

“‘Yes, all.’

“‘I’m glad he does!’ she cried, throwing her arms up wildly. ‘I’m glad he does! I don’t fear him—it’s him that fears me! There’s that might be proved that would bring him low enough; but who’s to prove it?—not me! There’s nothing I can say would do any good. And, God help me, he’s akin to you—this isn’t fit for you to hear!’

“‘If he has done wrong, he ought to make restitution,’ I said. ‘My kinship to him matters nothing.’

“‘You say that?’

“‘Yes. But surely it is not necessary that he should be exposed to the whole world. I

am in the dark. You yourself may be mistaken in what you believe.'

" 'Don't fancy that ; what I know is true, and if any day all the truth comes out, it's over with Mr. Rycroft—he must be disgraced. Surely it will come out ; surely them that's done no wrong, won't suffer for ever!'

" Deeply interested as I was, I saw that Mrs. Hallett was exhausting herself, and recommended that she should lie down, and rest awhile. I adjusted her pillow ; wiped the perspiration from her most unhappy-looking face ; and got her to swallow half a glass of wine. Then she lay still, and I sat down.

" I was shocked and bewildered, though I had expected something like this. I felt assured of two things ; first, that Mrs. Hallett was a very superior sort of woman of her class ; and next, that she was much more worthy of belief than Mr. Rycroft. Those agonised tones and gestures, that sweat, almost of blood, were real. The wrong that spoke so loudly, but unintelligibly, all around me, was a reality. Three persons appeared to be its victims—Miss Osborn, Gervase, and Mrs. Hallett. Three persons—Mr. Osborne was one of them—seemed to be in a league to perpetuate this wrong.

Fearful odds! I compelled myself to give up speculating, and read a chapter in the New Testament, in order to restore my composure. There is no better restorative when earth wearies us too much.

"Half an hour or more elapsed, during which Mrs. Hallett lay with her eyes closed. At length she opened them, and tried to raise herself. I stepped forward to help her.

" 'I shall miss you when you're gone,' she said. 'There's something in your face, and in your quiet ways, that makes me feel happier than I've a right to be. I've been careless for myself a long while, and you seem to have made me think for myself. If I at all deserve your goodness to me, I don't deserve to be beat down again, as I have been.'

"It gratified me to hear Mrs. Hallett speak in this way. If I had awakened her self-respect, I had done a great deal for her. My mother was right in asserting (not so much in words as deeds) that the law of kindness was the only universal law. God bless her for teaching me that truth, which Christ had taught her by the example of His life and death!

" 'I do not intend that you should miss me

altogether,' I said. 'I shall come to see you frequently. You have a right to think for yourself; and, with a consciousness of dealing justly by others, it will not be in the power of any to beat you down.'

"I spoke confidently, without feeling so confident as I ought to have been. I wished to encourage Mrs. Hallett, who was best acquainted with her own discouragements of many kinds. The wife of a man who chooses to treat her as a butcher treats an ox, only less mercifully, because his blows do not kill at once, can scarcely be called a free agent. There is something too repulsive for feminine contemplation in this aspect of woman's subserviency to, and inferiority to man. Only a born slave, a despot-bound prisoner, and a wife, may be mentally and physically tortured to the utmost of mortal endurance without hope of rescue, or sympathy from the world lying outside. If in any one of the three cases sympathy is expressed, or rescue attempted, the spasmodic effort, the excitement that is inevitable, are least efficacious in the case of the wife. The claims of *her* tyrant are indisputable. Mrs. Hallett was further fettered by a love for her husband that no ill-usage, and no consciousness of unworthiness

on his part, could crush out of her. And she was further fettered by a limited knowledge of the wrong she was willing to redress. I learned all this during the communications with her that left me ready to allow for her short-comings.

“‘I’m thankful to believe that you won’t quite forsake us—me and Gervase,’ she said. ‘I’m thankful to think we don’t deserve you should. I can declare this much to you. I never lied with my senses about me, and what you heard me say when my sense was gone, was only a groping after the truth. I can do little more now than grope for the truth. So far as I know it, I’ll declare it before Mr. Rycroft, and all the world. I think you’ve helped to bring me to that resolution, for I’m a weak creature, that gives way to my likings. I like you. I’ll never again fall away from God, or from this world, so as to deserve to be put down by both. Tell that to Mr. Rycroft, and say it’s your doing, and tell him to follow my example. I’ll do at once what I can do. Is Gervase in the house?’”

“I immediately made inquiry. Gervase was not in the house, but he was within call, and I despatched Mrs. Byers to fetch him. I awaited his coming, told him his mother wished to see

him, and allowed him to enter her room alone. I was not sure, but hoped that she wished for my presence also. A second had scarcely elapsed when Gervase summoned me.

“Though belonging to the same class as Mrs. Byers, there was nothing of the latter’s obtrusive consciousness of her condition that resulted in servility about Mrs. Hallett. Her long seclusion from the world, her long battle with feelings that were nothing to the world, her wearily borne burden of secrets that might be something to it or not, seemed to have left with her only a consciousness of that higher relationship with humanity that levels all distinctions. She was one of a community that thought, and felt, and suffered—nothing more. In obedience to her will—how expressed I forget—Gervase stood at one side of her bed, and I at the other. My heart fluttered a little; and I noticed that Gervase was alternately pale and red. He took his mother’s hand, and attempted to kiss it.

“‘Not now, if it’s to be for the last time,’ she said, drawing her hand away. ‘You’ve yet to learn—and not too late—that there’s love out in the world for them that deserve love. Before I say anything more, Gervase, hear me

say this: whatever fortune, good or ill, comes to you in future, never forget this time; never forget the kindness that came to us in this time! never forget what's been done for me, that deserved nothing! I shall die before long, but the thankful feeling that's in me, the reverence that's in me, must live on, and in you! This is the last command I shall lay upon you. Never forget what's due to *her*!

"She pointed to me as she spoke. I was scarcely prepared for this climax. I looked hurriedly at Gervase, and met his eyes that, as if by some inspiration of the moment, were glowingly expressive of gratitude, and the admiration that grows out of it. This was so much more than I expected or desired that I felt even pained. I bent forward over Mrs. Hallett, and said:

" 'You have overrated my services, and made me feel rather foolish. You have at least said enough on this subject, if not too much.'

"Mrs. Hallett's feelings of every kind appeared to be strong. Yet, when she spoke, it was generally briefly, and always to the purpose, as if she restrained her impulses, and possessed the good taste to know when she had said enough.

“‘I sent for you,’ she continued, still addressing Gervase, who had briefly and earnestly expressed his sense of obligation to myself, ‘because I’ve something of importance on my mind, and the time seems to have come when I ought to speak out. I wish this young lady to hear what I have to say. Maybe you’ll both blame me, but I must say this—neither of you know what reason I had for acting as I did. Nineteen years ago, you, Gervase, was born. I can’t just yet tell you where, or how, you came to my hands. I wasn’t married then, but, soon after, Richard Hallett offered to marry me, and he promised to be a father to you if I’d have him. He was ten years younger than me, but I’d known him from a boy, and I liked him. I thought he’d be a protection to you, as well as to me, and he might have been, if he hadn’t been tempted, and so fallen into evil ways. You know what he’s been, ever since you can remember—a curse to them that belonged to him, and to himself—with only me to pity and make excuse for him. I’ve maybe done that too long. I’d you to pity, too; and, between both, I lost all care for myself. I wanted to act right; I prayed to God for light to show me what I had best do—but I seemed to be

always in the dark. It seemed cruel to tell you you'd neither father nor mother, bad as them you owned was, and it was cruel to let you be disgraced by them that was nothing to you. I tried to make amends to you in every way I could—I tried to teach you good ways, to make your home as comfortable as I could. It wasn't in my power to teach you more, because I could neither read nor write myself. I tried to stand out for your being sent to school, but Hallett always silenced me with blows. But you was born clever, and you got on without his help or mine, and oh, it was a proud, glad time when you began to read the Bible to me! Then I more than ever thought God had sent you to me, for I was left alone in the world, and I had a heart that needed something to love. I couldn't make up my mind to say I wasn't your mother, for I'd always loved you like one. I do that now, while I'm teaching you to hate me !'

“Uttering a strange, wild, desolate cry, she covered her face with the bed-clothes. Gervase had stood holding his clasped hands before his eyes ; and, glancing at him now and then, I saw that the muscles of his face worked convulsively, and that he was alternately flushed and pale as

death. He would have fallen in my opinion if he had done less than he did, when that cry struck upon his ear. Gently drawing back the bed-clothes he kissed Mrs. Hallett's cheek, and took her hand and held it in both his own caressingly.

“ ‘What once has been between us two, must be for ever,’ he said. ‘You’ve deserved that I should love you as a mother, and I have done, and do that. I owe no love to anyone else. I thank God that this is the case. I have no father; no name then? It is best that I enquire no further.’

“He stood so as to hide his flushed face from me. I cannot tell you how pained I felt on his account. I looked eagerly at Mrs. Hallett, wondering what she would say next; but she was wholly occupied with her happiness of the moment.

“ ‘I’ve not lost my son!’ she cried exultingly. ‘It’s true then, that God gave him to me! I’ll never murmur again, let what will come! My child that I’ve so loved!—my child!’

“She drew him towards her; held his head to her bosom with one hand, and with the other smoothed down his bright, curling hair, as if he had still been a child. Gervase’s manner

of submitting to these endearments pleased me. He was quite unembarrassed, and spoke to her caressingly, as if he had forgotten my presence. When he at length lifted his head, his face, wet with tears, had brightened.

“ ‘Now, more than ever,’ he said, ‘I have something to strive for, and I am free to strive. You shall yet, mother, be proud of the son who owes everything to you. I belong to you, and you only.’

“ ‘Isn’t he brave and good?’ said Mrs. Hallett, turning to me with an expression on her face that made her look really handsome. ‘Mightn’t any mother be proud of him? And there’s them that shall be proud of him yet, and I shall live to see it! Aye, my boy, and you may hold your head up with the best; for there’s much you’ve got to come to yet—but not to disgrace anyway. I, Margaret Hallett, say it, and I know it’ll be proved before long! I’ve said as much to Miss Moore, and she believes me.’

“ Gervase suddenly turned upon me, his face radiant with a new light. I looked back reassuringly in reply to his own look of eager enquiry. God forgive me if I, to whom so little was known, was aiding to inspire false hopes. I

could not help it, for I believed what Mrs. Hallett said to be true.

“ ‘Gervase,’ she said, speaking more quietly, ‘will you promise me to wait patiently till the time comes when I can do good by telling you all? Will you trust to the love that’s trying to do the best for you? Will you do this for my sake, and because telling you more now would only hinder me? What I’ve let you know, everybody may know.’

“ ‘As I said before, you’ve been a mother to me, and I owe you the duty of a son,’ said Gervase. ‘It shall be as you wish : I am satisfied.’

“ ‘Shortly after this, Gervase left us.

“ ‘You see how dutiful he is,’ said Mrs. Hallett ; ‘he’s been dutiful from a child.’

“ ‘He does you credit,’ I said ; ‘you have brought him up well.’

“ ‘He was born good ; that’s it. And it’s killing me to think what he might have been, and should be now. Some way I’ve always hoped that God would step in and make all right. I’ve waited for that : maybe I’ve done wrong.’

“ ‘Wrong indeed, if you have expected God to do for you what you might do for yourself,’ I said. ‘We can only pray that God will

strengthen our own hands to do what is right, and work while we pray. If after doing our best, we are not successful, we can with some confidence confide the issue to His hands.'

" 'I believe you're right,' said Mrs. Hallett; 'but what a battle it is for them that's weak in themselves: and for them that's beat down, and haven't the knowledge of things so as to see what's best to do first! It's all light in me, but all dark outside of me; and oh, my God, what strength there is in them that have money!'

" 'You are wrong again,' I said. 'There is no real strength in riches alone. They only who do what is right before God and man, are truly strong. And before this true strength everything that is wrong must give way; at some time—in God's time, which can never be too late.'

" 'I've needed such a friend as you are, to strengthen my hands, long ago,' said Mrs. Hallett. 'You've made me see things in a better light. Surely God sent you to give me strength! I wish you'd read to me again; it does me good.'

"I opened the bible and read to her till I thought she had fallen asleep. Late in the

afternoon she opened her eyes, raised herself up, and exclaimed :

“ ‘ What I’ve said to Gervase, I’ll say to you ; don’t seek to know any more till I’ve had time to think and pray, and know what’s best to be done. Wickedness doesn’t prosper to the end ; you know that.’ ”

“ ‘ Not to the end ; but the end is not here—not in this world. If it were otherwise, many might indeed despair.’ ”

“ ‘ You lift me up and throw me down,’ said Mrs. Hallett. ‘ You don’t know what it is to suffer as I’ve done ; to hope as I’ve done for years ; I must hope on, or I must die.’ ”

“ ‘ God forbid that I should take any hope from you,’ I said ; ‘ I did not mean to do that ; I would much rather help you.’ ”

“ ‘ And you might help ; there’s much you might do !’ she said eagerly. ‘ But I’m saying what I didn’t mean to say : I can’t expect you to go against your own kin. That wouldn’t be right.’ ”

“ ‘ To do right would not be going against any one,’ I said. ‘ What is it I might do ?’ ”

“ ‘ This then,’ said Mrs. Hallett. ‘ You’re in the same house with Miss Osborne ; you’ll see her, you’ll hear her speak ; you’ll be able to judge

whether she's mad or not ; and whether she'd be glad to know what they won't let her know.'

" ' I felt an interest in Miss Osborne before I saw you,' I said. ' Now she interests me more than ever.'

" Nothing more was said. But it seemed to be understood between us that what I had surmised was true :—that Gervase was Miss Osborne's son ; and that Miss Osborne had a right to be named otherwise."

CHAPTER VII.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

“ Staunton Court, Nov. 10th.

“ HERE I am again. Yesterday I left Mrs. Hallett, who was so far recovered as to be able to help herself. Her husband is still missing.

“ Mrs. Rycroft came to fetch me by appointment. She kept her seat in the carriage; but, before leaving the house, I saw her with her head out of the window, peering about curiously. Mrs. Byers, whose term of service was also to end that day, was the last person to whom I said good-bye; and I gave her a small gratuity, in consideration of the trouble she had been at on my account. Dropping one of her low curtseys as she took it, she said :

“ “ Indeed, mum, it’s more nor I expected or wished for, mum. I’m far from covetous; and

I'm sure I'm glad to see what good luck some folks has. I hope you won't find no ungratefulness, mum.'

"I had taken a very different leave of Mrs. Hallett, and of Gervase, whose emotion seemed to master him. Charles Trevor, who was in tip-top spirits, seized hold of my small packages, and sallied out before me.

" 'Here we are!' he shouted at the top of his voice; 'we've done for this time, and earned our wages, and the best of characters to boot! Miss Moore and I are in partnership: it's Moore and Co. now; I'm one of the infirm—no, the firm; that's it. Come along, Miss Moore!'

" 'You very noisy, rude boy, be quiet, do!' said Mrs. Rycroft. 'Thomas, take those parcels from him. I'm quite ashamed of you, Master Trevor.'

" 'Don't trouble yourself,' said Charles, coolly.

"I didn't know whether he directed his speech to Thomas or Mrs. Rycroft; but he threw the packages into the carriage, and then mounted to the footman's place behind.

" 'That tiresome boy!' exclaimed Mrs. Rycroft, as I took my seat. 'Now, Charles,' she continued, putting her head out at the window,

‘if you’re to go with us, you must come down there and sit in front.’

“ ‘Anything to please you,’ said Charles ; and in a few seconds he was seated by the coachman.

“ ‘To please me!’ said Mrs. Rycroft, angrily, as we drove away. ‘Them Trevors is vulgar, and I think it presumptuous in them to make so free as they do. You see, my dear, they’re neighbours, and pretty well to do, and we can’t but be civil to them ; but they’re not people of any breeding—not distinguished at all ; and such like always encroaches.—And so, you very hodd girl, you’ve had your freak out ! Don’t be afraid ; I’m not angry (I wasn’t at all afraid) ; but I didn’t like it at first, it had such a look with it ! Well, you’ve made a noise, I can tell you. The hidea of Mr. Rycroft’s niece doing such a thing ! Our clergyman, Mr. Rawson, tells the young ladies he’s thankful you’ve set them such a hexample ; and the young gentlemen says they’re afraid you’re too good for ’em. Dr. Frank meant to have come with me ; but he was, marched off to Moorlands in a hurry, to see a poor woman that’s dying—a Miss Thorpe, I believe, or some such name. Well, now, tell me all about it.’

“Mrs. Rycroft asked me all sorts of questions one after the other, and I had so little to reveal that my replies could not satisfy her. The Halletts were considered to be very mysterious people; it was rumoured that they were rich, though the son worked at his trade—that of a fisherman. Mrs. Rycroft expressed disappointment at hearing that no signs of wealth were discoverable in the house—nor of disorder, so far as I could see; and that Peggy Hallett was to all appearance a quiet, decent sort of woman.

“‘Dear me,’ she said, ‘I expected to hear something quite different.’

“The carriage stopped, and Charles Trevor got down; and instantly his face and both hands were protruded through the open window.

“‘You’re not going to be so shabby as to pass without coming in?’ he said. ‘You’ll not break up a flourishing firm—Moore and Co., you know—all of a sudden like this? Besides (lowering his voice), Miss Moore knows I shall catch it if she doesn’t go in with me and prove the partnership. They daren’t scold me before her; and before she goes they’ll be in a good humour.’

“It was gratuitous on the part of Charles to

say that I knew he would catch it ; however, I was willing to acknowledge the partnership, and said I was ready to accompany him into the house if Mrs. Rycroft had no objection, and if he would be quiet.

“ ‘ I never did see such a boy ! ’ exclaimed Mrs. Rycroft. ‘ Well,’ she continued, laughing, and with a touch of good nature that pleased me, ‘ I think we may as well humour him this once. I know they’re all dying to see you ; and they’ll take it kind if you call on them first. There ; open the door, you bad boy, and let us out.’

“ What Mrs. Rycroft said inclined me to turn back, but it was too late. Besides, as it seemed inevitable that I was to be made a sort of show of, the sooner the first exhibition was over the better. All this time I had been looking at the house : a large, old-fashioned brick house, with stone facings and heavy-framed windows, standing in its own grounds, and a little removed from the road in front. It was probably built in the reign of Queen Anne.

“ Following Charles, who walked on boldly, and Mrs. Rycroft, whose ample person and dress formed a good screen, I advanced along the wide gravelled carriage-way, and presently

saw that the front door was opened by a young lady, who had probably watched our approach through one of the windows. There were several steps before the door, and the young lady descended them in order to meet us.

“ ‘Here’s your sort, Lucy!’ exclaimed the unabashed Charles, shouting at the top of his voice: ‘ “The newly consolidated general Nursing Company, established as the act directs, with all sorts of provisos, and a capital of three millions sterling. Shareholders to apply to Moore and Co., who will give satisfactory references.—N.B. A treasurer wanted, who is to find himself—and everybody else concerned.” That’s our prospectus, Lucy!’

“ ‘You impudent thing!’ said Lucy, looking at me timidly.

“ I confess that I was terribly annoyed. Not that I did not feel, even at the moment, that Charles’s version of the affair, ridiculous as it was, would be something to fall back upon, in case I found myself too oppressively lauded and lionized as a professedly benevolent young lady. Between the two extremes I might find my true place. Mrs. Rycroft introduced me to Miss Lucy Trevor, whom I at once made up my mind to like. She may be twenty-three or-

twenty-four years of age; but there is an air of simplicity about her, and an artlessness in all she says, that make her look younger. Her face is pretty; her complexion being brilliant, and her eyes having a remarkably sweet expression. Her figure is about the middle size, and plump; and altogether she has the appearance of being a remarkably robust little body.

“‘You can’t think how glad I am to see you,’ she said, frankly holding out her hand, and then retaining mine; ‘and it’s so good of you to come in this free way, before we’ve had a chance of visiting you. Father will be so delighted, and so will Jane. We’ve been talking about you every day. Oh, thank you, Mrs. Rycroft, very much for bringing her!’

“‘I think you ought to thank me,’ said Charles, ‘for it was I that brought her. And out of respect to the firm of Moore and Co., remember you’re to treat me civilly in future.’

“‘Get along with you!’ said Mrs. Rycroft.

“We all walked forward, Lucy still retaining my hand, and entered a large, old-fashioned pannelled parlour, having a high mantel-piece carved in flowers, and two huge cupboards on either side the fire-place. In an easy chair, placed near the fire, reclined a venerable man, whose

hair was white as snow, and whose countenances was pleasant to look upon, its expression was so mild and benevolent. At the centre table was seated a staid-looking lady, perhaps thirty-five years of age, attired in the quietest of morning dresses. She was engaged in the housewifely occupation of mending stockings, and did not shuffle away her basket of work on account of our approach.

“ ‘This is Miss Moore,’ said Lucy, who still retained my hand. ‘Isn’t it good of her to come and see us? My father and sister, Miss Moore.’

“ ‘Miss Trevor rose from her chair.

“ ‘I’m sure we shall be quite proud to make your acquaintance, Miss Moore,’ she said. ‘Do come forward and sit down.’

“ ‘You may make much of her,’ said Mrs. Rycroft, throwing herself into an easy chair that stood opposite Mr. Trevor’s, ‘for she doesn’t care to visit anybody; and she really seemed to have a wish to come here.’

“ ‘Let Miss Moore sit by me,’ said Mr. Trevor, putting on his spectacles. ‘I can’t see her at this distance; she’ll humour an old man’s infirmities, I’m sure. God bless you, my child!’ he added, when I had seated myself, and he had

taken a brief survey of me; 'for you're only a child, and I'm pleased to see it. We expected to see—what was it we expected to see, Jane Trevor?—a much older young lady certainly; a young lady much taller and larger made every way; a very imposing kind of young lady, with the look and air of a queen. I do assure you, Miss Moore, that both Jane Trevor and my little Lucy were half afraid of meeting so dignified a person as we supposed you to be.'

"I laughed a little, though I felt pained, thinking that so exaggerated an idea of myself could only have emanated from the Rycrofts. Lucy said :

" ' Father is making too much of it. Don't believe that we were at all afraid to meet you, Miss Moore.'

" ' It was all Lawrence's doing,' said Charles. ' You know, Miss Moore, he saw you get out of the stage coach, and he came home and told us you were like a Juno, or a Venus—like one of the heathen goddesses, you know; and when I said you wasn't like anything of the sort, they wouldn't believe me. They'll not catch me mistaking a pretty girl for a goddess, though they think I know nothing.'

" ' Charles makes so free with everybody.(he'd

make free with the Queen herself if she was here), that we don't always trust to his report,' said Miss Trevor. 'I'm sure that you must see he's very forward, Miss Moore.'

" 'And I'm afraid you've found him very troublesome,' said Mr. Trevor.

" 'On the contrary,' I said, 'I found him very useful. His cheerful spirit, and kind heart, and ready hand, have been a great help to me. I scarcely know how I should have got on without him; and he and I are fast friends, and I cannot hear a word against him.'

" 'Well,' said Mr. Trevor, 'I'm glad to hear that.'

" 'Oh, Charles is a favourite everywhere,' said Mrs. Rycroft. 'He often tells me to do things, and I do 'em without knowing what I'm about. I often say to myself, the deuce is in the boy. Well, what's the news? It's such a while since I saw any of you!'

" Mrs. Rycroft has great conversational powers—of the kind—and when she begins, it is scarcely possible for anyone else to put a word in. She talked now at a great rate, and Miss Trevor and Lucy seemed to have something to do to keep pace with her. While this was going on, I sat

quietly by the side of Mr. Trevor. Presently he leaned towards me and said—

“‘We have been greatly troubled about Charles, Miss Moore. He is very wild, but he has a good heart. And we are to blame, for we have spoiled him. You see he is the youngest. His mother died when he was born, and his mother was—’

“He stopped abruptly, and I saw that tears were glistening in his eyes. Mentally I finished the sentence—his mother was an angel! I felt as sure of it as if she had then stood before me robed with the flashing wings and white garments that typify the purity and power of glorified saints. I don’t know how it was that my hand found way to his, lying on the arm of his chair. We exchanged a pressure and a glance, and without a word being spoken, we seemed to understand each other perfectly.

“The stream of words flowed on. It was a relief to me when Charles, bold as ever, dragged Lucy towards me by the arm, and said—

“‘Did you ever see a fairy, Miss Moore? Here’s one—a real Yorkshire fairy. She’s one of them that frequent larders, and make free with the butter and cream; and you see she’s grown out of all proportion. Her own people

wouldn't acknowledge her after she got too big to scramble through a key-hole. So we took to her: but she's quite impish in her propensities; and if you don't mind, she'll be doing you a mischief, for she's too fat to do any good. You see there's more of the flesh than the spirit left of her.'

"'Charles can't help talking nonsense,' said Lucy, releasing herself.

"'I only speak the truth,' said Charles. 'Twenty years ago, Miss Moore, a mysterious stranger came to the house, who told us that she was to all intents and purposes a fairy. He disappeared the same day, and never turned up again, to the great regret of Jane, who had fallen violently in love with him. It was love at first sight, you know; and Jane never forgot him—so she's an old maid. He left behind him a short black pipe that he smoked, and Jane took possession of it and kept it as a relic. She has it locked up in a drawer, and it only sees the daylight now and then, when she takes it out to kiss it. You see there's a little romance in our family.'

"'There's a good deal of romance in what you are saying,' said Miss Trevor quietly, yet reddening very much; 'but I will say this, that

if I did fall in love with Mr. Moore, I showed good taste, for he was the most intelligent man and the handsomest man I have ever seen.'

" 'Spoken like a brick !' cried Charles, clapping his hands. 'Jane Trevor always sticks to her text, and I like her for it. So you see, Miss Moore, this namesake of yours ought to have been one of the family. I wonder if he was related to you ?'

" 'It is singular,' said Mr. Trevor, 'but it struck me just now that there was a resemblance in Miss Moore to the gentleman you are speaking of. It is not in the features but the expression. What do you say, Jane Trevor ?'

" 'Jane Trevor, as her father always named her, looked at me intently for a moment, and shook her head. She could not see the likeness at all.

" 'Yet there it is—I see it just now,' said Mr. Trevor, as I turned towards him. 'It is quite remarkable.'

" 'Now we're going to make a grand discovery,' said Charles, rubbing his hands. 'Somebody fetch Jane's smelling-bottle, while I proceed to investigate the matter. This Mr. Moore talked a good deal about Mr. Rycroft. I've heard you all say so.'

“Jane Trevor bit her lip, and Mr. Trevor frowned slightly. Certainly both looked rebukingly at Charles.

“‘It is true that Mr. Rycroft was mentioned in the course of the conversation we had together,’ said Mr. Trevor. ‘I had been with Mr. Moore and the friend who accompanied him to visit the mine. I had introduced them both to Edward Thorpe. Naturally enough Mr. Rycroft’s name was introduced; but he was an entire stranger to Mr. Moore, who had never before heard of him.’

“‘Oh! of course your Mr. Moore is nothing to us,’ said Mrs. Rycroft. ‘Never mind him,’ and she again chatted with Jane Trevor.

“I could not feel so sure that this Mr. Moore was nothing to myself. Twenty years ago my father must have been eminently handsome. He was handsome to the last. Highly intelligent, he would have been also, and so far the description answered. But what struck me most was the anecdote about the short, black pipe. You know, Grace, that my father never used any other than short, black pipes. Besides, I remembered his telling me that he had visited Scarborough just before I was born, in company with Mr. Fraser. He was fond of rambling about

and visiting whatever was worth seeing ; and the two might have journeyed thus far in order to see the mine and the wild scenery about it, which Charles Trevor had described to me while I was at the Halletts'. I could not get this idea out of my head. I said at length, abruptly—

“ ‘ You spoke of Mr. Moore being accompanied by a friend. Do you recollect his name ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Yes, perfectly, ’ said Mr. Trevor. ‘ His name was Fraser, and he was a much older man. ’ ”

“ ‘ And Mr. Moore’s Christian name was Charles, ’ said Lucy. ‘ He gave Lawrence a book and wrote his name in it. ’ ”

“ ‘ And I was named after him, at Jane’s particular request, ’ said Charles. ‘ I was christened Charles Henry, and there isn’t another Charles in the family. ’ ”

“ ‘ I believe I turned pale : I am sure my lips trembled, as I said— ”

“ ‘ That gentleman was certainly my father. ’ ”

“ A dead silence followed this announcement. Opposite me sat Jane Trevor, white as a ghost. Before a word had been spoken, a very bright-eyed, very rosy-cheeked young lady, fairly burst into the room, laughing merrily, her bonnet

dangling from her arm by the strings, her hair in beautiful disorder, as if it had been considerably blown about by the wind. She was closely followed by the gentlemanly young man whom I had seen for a few moments on the first night of my arrival—Lawrence Trevor.

“The young lady’s mirth abated instantly, though she surveyed us all with a very saucy air. Mr. Lawrence, after bowing to me, seemed to look around him with much astonishment. Charles, quite excited, broke out in his usual style:—

“‘I told you we should want a smelling-bottle! Does nobody see that Jane’s fainting, and that Miss Moore is wanting a glass of water, or something? Lucy, you run for a glass of water. What do you think, Lawrence? Here we’ve been making the most wonderful of modern discoveries. Everybody must be introduced to everybody over again. I’m related to Miss Moore; I’m her foster-brother, or something of that sort; Mr. Moore, that should have been my god-father, was her own father. We’re all relations together, you know. I never knew anything so jolly in my life!’

“‘It appears to be a fact, Lawrence,’ said Mr. Trevor, ‘that this young lady is the daughter

of *our* Mr. Moore; she will be doubly welcome to us all, for his sake.'

"Lawrence advanced to me hastily, and grasped my hand warmly, his face beaming with pleasure.

" 'This is quite an unexpected gratification,' he said, 'but, like all gratifications, it has its alloy; you have lost your father.'

" 'Well, now, if I didn't forget that!' exclaimed Charles; 'what a beast I am!' and he sat down and covered his face with his hands.

"Lucy threw her arms round my neck and kissed me. Jane Trevor alone said nothing—she looked troubled and confused.

" 'O! it's the Mr. Moore I've heard you talk about,' exclaimed the young lady who was presently introduced to me by the name of Mary Liddell; 'and you've always been expecting he would some day come to see you again! How sad that is! You must let me love you very much, Miss Moore.'

" 'I think there must be some mistake,' said Mrs. Rycroft, who had suddenly become cold and constrained. 'It's a hodd thing, indeed, if Mr. Moore was here, and didn't go to see his uncle. I can't understand it at all.'

" 'Perhaps,' said Mr. Trevor, 'he was not

aware that the Mr. Rycroft we spoke of together was his uncle. It would seem that he was not. As regards himself, he was certainly a most gentlemanly and intelligent young man. He was an extraordinary man; his conversational powers were wonderful; and there was something very fascinating about him. He was a man to be loved as well as admired. I remember how astonished we all were when we discovered that it was past twelve o'clock at night; and Jane and Lawrence were sitting up with us, not a bit tired. We wished him to stop all night, but he would not, and bade us all good bye, saying he hoped to see us again, some day. So we really did think that some day we *should* see him again. He certainly made a great impression upon us; we always speak and think of him as an old friend.'

"I felt a little distressed, for this reason; it seemed cruel to have to say to these kind persons, who had thought so highly of my father, and who had so treasured the recollection of him, that I had never heard him mention them, or his visit to this place. I could not help thinking that Mr. Rycroft had something to do with this silence. Certainly my father must have known that the Mr. Ry-

croft he conversed about, with Mr. Trevor, was his uncle. And he would not own him—he never named him to me—so that I did not know there was such a person! He was ashamed of him, Grace—of this man of whose relationship I myself am not proud. And Jane Trevor: my impression with regard to her was, that her heart had really been touched by her father's clever and fascinating young guest; that he had supplied her with an ideal of which all others fell far short. She, like the rest, had hoped that he would come again; and now within a few minutes, she had learned that he was married when she first saw him, and that he was dead. I feared to look towards her, she was so stonily silent and still.

“ ‘We had not the least idea that your father was a married man,’ said Mr. Trevor, ‘he looked so young. But he must have been married then, for it is just nineteen years ago, and we have heard that you are nineteen years old.’

“ ‘I believe I was born about a month after that visit of my father's into Yorkshire,’ I said.

“ ‘Well,’ said Mrs. Rycroft, rising, and adjusting her dress noisily, as she was in a habit of doing, ‘I think it is time we were going. I've heard some very hodd things, indeed; I

don't know what Mr. Rycroft may think of it. Good morning to you all—don't disturb yourselves, pray. Catherine, I hope you're ready, for we ought to be at home.'

"She sailed out of the room as she spoke, but I could not follow her immediately. My new friends—my old friends—which shall I call them? the latter, certainly—crowded round me.

" 'My dear child,' said Mr. Trevor, 'you must always come to this house as to a home.'

" 'And you must come very often,' said Lucy; 'promise that you will!'

" 'And don't forget our relationship,' said Charles. "I shall not say Miss Moore any more, and so now you know; you're my sister.'

" 'And I shall be so glad to see you, always,' said Mary Liddell.

"I turned to Jane Trevor—not she to me. Disregarding my hand, which I held out, she placed both hers on my shoulders, gazed me full in the eyes with a strange, dreamy look; kissed me on the forehead, and released me without saying a word. Ah, Grace! I seemed to read much in that look that none else might read! what wonderful secrets a human heart may hide unsuspected! my own heart was very full of strange and sorrowful emotions; I

longed to throw myself on Jane Trevor's neck and weep.

"Lawrence and Charles accompanied me to the carriage in which Mrs. Rycroft was already seated. I had certainly left my heart behind me. Mrs. Rycroft was out of humour, and silent. It seems a pity that we cannot choose our relations, as we choose our friends. But after all, what are the Rycrofts to me? I am certainly more nearly related to the Trevors.

"I observed much during this visit that impressed and dwelt with me. Mrs. Rycroft was more unaffected and pleasant in the presence of the Trevors (until she got affronted, as I have told you), than I supposed she could be anywhere; as if she had felt compelled to adapt herself to the simplicity of their manners, or really had a liking for them that led to simplicity of manner in herself. On the other hand, the Trevors did not meet her with all the cordiality that I am sure they cannot help exhibiting towards those they respect and love. They have reserves with Mrs. Rycroft; they keep her at a certain distance. I felt assured, rather from Mr. Trevor's manner and look, than his words, that he entertained a suspicion of my father having been quite aware of the vi-

cinity of his uncle during his visit here ; and further, I fancied that he was the more cordial with myself, in consequence of this suspicion. For some reason, the Rycrofts are not thoroughly respected in their high position, nor ordinarily trusted—I feel sure of this. When we had entered the grounds of Staunton Court, Mrs. Rycroft spoke :—

“ ‘ I think it would have been better if you hadn’t told the Trevors that person was your father, which I don’t see was proved at all. The Trevors isn’t people we think much of ; but they think a good deal of themselves ; they’re very fussy people, I can tell you ; and they like to lift themselves above everybody. I’ll assure you it was a long while before your uncle could make up his mind to us having anything to do with them. Your uncle always held his head above the Trevors ; and nobody need ever have been ashamed to visit *him*.’ ”

“ I had got myself into a scrape. I acknowledged that, socially, Mr. Rycroft’s position appeared to be much superior to Mr. Trevor’s ; and this a little pacified the lady. I did not add that in comparison with intellectual and moral worth, social position weighed little in my estimation. There are some truths that it

seems impossible to declare before some persons, unless you are prepared for contention, or can make up your mind to a profitless waste of breath. I contented myself with saying that I liked the Trevors very much. Mrs. Rycroft hoped to introduce me to 'some that was better worth liking.'

"Elizabeth was either not at home, or she wilfully kept out of my way, for I did not see her until dinner-time. But I was summoned to an interview with Mr. Rycroft, whom I found in the library.

I had little to tell him, thanks to the good sense and feeling of Mrs. Hallett, which had led her to reveal to me no more than she was willing to let all the world know. I acquainted him with her declaration respecting Gervase; that he was nothing akin to herself or Hallett.

" 'And she didn't hint at his being akin to somebody else?'

" 'She mentioned no names. She certainly did more than hint that he, and others connected with him, had been grievously wronged in some way; and she expressed a hope that the wrong would ultimately be redressed.'

" 'Oh,' said Mr. Rycroft; 'you may tell her from me, that she's an old fool. She must be

an obstinate beast, or Hallett would have tamed her before this time. I am acquainted with all the facts, of course. The lad is illegitimate; declaring his parentage would do no good to him, and would be the ruin of some others who could not bear up against such public reproach as would lie on them. You see, it's been a troublesome affair to me to keep all this quiet; and I wish I was rid of it. But what I've once promised, I'll perform, to the best of my ability. Hallett himself is a thorough scamp, who knows what hold he has upon us; and his silence is only to be purchased by money, which he extorts all along. There is no safety even with him, for in one of his drunken fits he may let all out. I've offered to give him any sum to go abroad, but he won't go. He's worse than the devil; he would delight in bringing us to ruin after torturing us in every possible way. I declare to you, Catherine, that this affair has often made me feel life a burden.'

"Mr. Rycroft spoke excitedly; he had a very care-worn look. He has changed considerably for the worse since I first saw him.

"‘I do not understand,’ I said, ‘why the burden should fall so heavily and exclusively on you. The exposure threatens others, and not

yourself, or any belonging to you at all. I understood you to say so.'

" ' Good God, don't be a fool ! I have feelings and interests at stake. I am attached to this family, the Osbornes ; it would kill me to see them dishonoured. So long as the secret is safe, and no longer, I enjoy certain privileges. If the latter was not the case, I should be quite as anxious as I am. I'm so fixed, that there's nobody I can consult. Mr. Osborne is a proud man ; a man of ungovernable passions—if you thwart his humour, he's like a wild beast—all the Osbornes have been alike for that. He expects me to keep all right ; and rather than hear one word from me on the subject, he'd have all come out, and then make an end of it all by shooting himself through the head. What is one to do in such a difficult case ?'

" ' I cannot advise,' I said, ' I cannot feel any interest in, or any respect for such a man as you describe Mr. Osborne to be. What I heard respecting him in London, led me to form a very different opinion of him. If your account of him be quite correct, I think he is unworthy of the trouble you are at, to spare his feelings. *He* does not appear to consider the feelings of any one.'

"Understand this," said Mr. Rycroft, who seemed eager to convince me; "his father was a good friend to me when I began life; and for his sake I am content to suffer so long as I can do any good to the family. Now you understand all the case. You are a steady, sensible girl, Catherine, and that's made me confide in you as I never did in anybody else—not even in Mrs. Rycroft, as I told you before. If you will, I think you may help us a good deal."

"I am quite willing to help any that really need help," I said.

"I am sure you are," said Mr. Rycroft. "Your coming here seems to be quite providential. I'm getting in years, Catherine, as you see: it's time I had a little rest after suffering a great part of my life through the sinfulness of other people. You say you found that woman and lad grateful. I dare say, now, you'd have some influence over them. You'd be doing both a good service if you could persuade the woman to leave the country and take the lad with her;—I'd make it worth her while. If she liked, it could be done without Hallett's knowledge; I can manage him."

"I dare not undertake such a task at present," I said; "I do not see my way clear. Besides,

this Mrs. Hallett is no ordinary woman. She is not one to be tempted by money, or daunted by ill-usage. She may be labouring under a mistake ; but what she sees right to do she will do, and nothing less than that. You speak of Mr. Osborne as being unmanageable ; this woman is even more unmanageable, because she believes that she has right on her side, and she is conscientious. She fears God, and not man. This is a strong position ; and it would only be folly to assail it in any common way.'

“ ‘Curse her !’ muttered Mr. Rycroft (mentally I think he cursed me too). ‘She must be convinced that she *is* labouring under a mistake, Catherine. You must assure her that she is ; that if we have any more nonsense with her she and the lad will lose every chance of being helped. Something may be done in this way. The woman takes to the boy, you say ; Hallett is selfish, and cares only for himself. You tell her this lad, being most certainly illegitimate, has no claim upon anybody ; but on her going away from this place with him immediately, I am willing to advance a sum of money that will give him a fair start in life. I’ll pay her passage and his to any part of the world they like to go to. It’s more than I’ve any authority to do ; I shall be

out of pocket ; but I'll do it freely to get rid of them.'

"Mr. Rycroft again found me at fault. I fear I am destined to fail him altogether. 'I think,' I said, 'the assurance that she is labouring under a mistake would come better from you than from me—I, as she is herself well assured, knowing nothing of the facts.'

" 'Why, bless my soul, I tell you what the facts are : you believe me, don't you ?' said Mr. Rycroft, growing redder in the face.

" ' *She* would not believe *me*,' I said. 'I have an idea that she would laugh at me. Perhaps you have never seen her ?—you don't know her ?'

" 'I've seen her—many years ago,' said Mr. Rycroft. 'As to knowing her, I know she's quite a low sort of woman.'

"He spoke hurriedly at first, and then contemptuously, as if my latter suggestion had wounded his dignity. And yet he seemed to expect that *I* knew her thoroughly. I evidently knew her better than he did, and I hastened to enlighten him.

" 'She is poor and uneducated,' I said ; 'but she is a woman in whose presence you may lose sight of those two facts. She is naturally

strong-minded, sensible, kind and brave. She is a consciously injured woman, who feels and understands, and does not resist. She is a woman burdened with some half knowledge, or imagination, of a wrong that oppresses her conscience, and tries her affections, and that leaves her undecided how to act, yet determined to act in the moment that she sees her way. She is a woman to be feared, if I have read herself and the circumstances surrounding her right. The resoluteness that is in her, and that will surely show itself if she lives, is not to be met in any common-place way. And putting her aside altogether, you must allow me to set you right with regard to her reputed son. He is no mere boy to be told to do this or that, and expected to do it; he is a fine, intelligent young man, highly gifted in many ways, quite as sensitive (so it seems to me) as your Mr. Osborne, without, like him, abandoning his true place. I respect God's dealing with him in this matter, and take him as he is. You have made me acquainted with these two individuals, and this is my report of them. You have to deal with a desperate woman, and a self-respecting and respectable man.'

"Why I spoke thus strongly, and why Mr.

Rycroft shrank visibly in his chair, as if his usual dimensions had been curtailed on a sudden, I cannot explain to you, except that there was an antagonism between us that produced these two effects. You will understand that on my mind rested a conviction that Mr. Rycroft was dealing unfairly ; and that he was unfairly calling upon me to act in a matter respecting which he knew I had no clear understanding. Near to him as I inevitably was, I as inevitably stood aloof from him. He gathered himself up presently, and said :

“ ‘Say nothing about this ; I must deal with it as I can. Whatever you do, don’t let a word slip before your aunt and cousin. I’ve been at immense expense and trouble to keep the matter quiet, and it would be a dreadful thing to fail at last. I’m sure I may trust to your discretion ; and I sha’n’t forget how willing you’ve been to serve me. I have it in my power to serve you and I will. Now go to your aunt.’ ”

“ Mr. Rycroft is very ready with his offer of services (promised in the offensive way of reward) which I never mean to accept. It is useless to reiterate this latter fact. I shall not remain here long. I have a love of independence that will not allow me to lead an idle life. You will see,

Grace, that without a word having been directly spoken on the subject, it is understood betwixt Mr. Rycroft, Mrs. Hallett and myself, that Gervase is Miss Osborne's son. At present I will say nothing further as to what I think and believe. I am in a very unenviable state of mind, Grace.

"Mrs. Rycroft chose to be very distant with me during the whole of this day: and in order to relieve myself of her society I took a long stroll about the grounds, which are really beautiful. But I did not enjoy the beauty or observe it as I should have done some time ago. My mind was occupied with many thoughts, and I must leave you to guess at the nature of them. I believe I am becoming reserved even with you, Grace.

"At dinner we had company: Dr. Frank and his wife; therefore Miss Osborne did not appear. I do not like Mrs. Frank. She is a tall, spare woman, with a shrewish, sharp face, and the smallest and coldest black eyes I ever saw. They are like two glass beads; as round, and glittering, and wanting in depth. She looked so pertinaciously at me that I thought she came for the purpose—as probably she did. During dinner Mr. Rycroft made an en-

quiry respecting the Doctor's last patient, Miss Thorpe.

“ ‘ Oh, she'll not get over it,’ said the Doctor. ‘ It's a case of paralysis ; and after doing all I could, I left Jackson with her. But it's of no use ; she's dying as fast as she can.’ ”

“ ‘ She must be a very old woman,’ said Mrs. Rycroft.

“ ‘ I don't pretend to be a judge of ladies' ages,’ said Dr. Frank, ‘ but she must be old, as you say. However, she looks to me much as she has always looked—neither younger nor older. I don't think any of the Thorpes ever did look young—certainly not in my time. Edward always looked old, but he was a worthy fellow ; you may look a long while before you find a better.’ ”

“ ‘ I remembered that Mr. Trevor had said he introduced my father to this same Mr. Thorpe (as I supposed), and I listened with some interest.

“ ‘ ‘ I didn't know him,’ said Mrs. Rycroft. ‘ I suppose his sisters are very disagreeable people. I had a servant that lived with them, and she told strange tales of their ways.’ ”

“ ‘ Indeed ! ’ said Dr. Frank.

“ ‘ ‘ They are very odd indeed,’ said Mrs. Frank,

‘so niggardly that they grudge themselves the food they eat. Then they are always snarling at one another; and as for scandalmongering, I suppose there never was anything like them. I couldn’t live with them a day.’

“Dr. Frank gave utterance to a loud ‘hem!’

“‘Well, I believe they never had any acquaintances but them old Miss Winstays, that’s quite as bad,’ said Mrs. Rycroft.

“‘I don’t allow anybody to traduce the Misses Winstay,’ said Dr. Frank; ‘they are old friends of mine. When I was a boy they were very good to me, and we’ve never had a quarrel. They were my mother’s friends; and I can bear testimony that they’ve done good to many. As to the Misses Thorpe, I can’t speak positively; I never had a chance of visiting Moorlands before to-day; for none of the Misses Thorpe were ever ill, which, I must say, was rather shabby of them. Old Thorpe himself dropped off the perch before my father could reach him.’

“‘I shall never be able to break the doctor of these vulgar expressions,’ said Mrs. Frank.

“‘My dear, I must acknowledge that you have wasted a good deal of admonition upon me. I was about to observe, that during Edward Thorpe’s long illness, I frequently met one of

the sisters at his house ; the youngest, perhaps, though she looks old, of course : I must say that she appeared to me to be a very kind, homely sort of body."

" ' Oh, we know that you meet with kind and good people every day,' said Mrs. Frank, tossing her head. ' It's all your want of discrimination.'

" ' If want of discrimination leads to such a result, don't let us quarrel with it—don't you, especially. You see it keeps me in good humour.'

" ' For my part, I don't believe that an old maid could be anything but disagreeable,' said Elizabeth.

" ' That's just such a speech as Rebecca Winstay made when about your age,' said Dr. Frank ; ' I've heard my father remind her of it ; for he was very blunt—something like his son. Rebecca wouldn't be an old maid for all the world. So mind what you say, Miss Elizabeth. For my part, having seen a good deal of both, I don't think there's the toss up of a halfpenny between the wives and the old maids, so far as amiability goes.'

" ' Do make yourself as disagreeable as you can, pray !' said Mrs. Frank, snappishly. Cer-

tainly I was wrong in supposing that Dr. Frank had a happy home.

“ ‘My dear, I am far from wishing to make myself disagreeable ; I have a great objection to disagreeable people myself. I am apt to blunder, I know; but what I meant to say was, that in proportion to their number, there are as many amiable old maids as wives. Consequently, they are fairly balanced the other way. Am I saying something atrocious ?’ (He might well ask, for Mrs. Frank was looking daggers at him.) ‘My dear, remember that fools and children generally speak the truth. Miss Moore, you’re neither an old maid nor a wife; permit me to take refuge for a moment with you. I had a particular reason for thinking of you while I was at Moorlands to-day.’

“ ‘It gratifies me to know that you think of me at any time,’ I said.

“ ‘H’m ! thank you for that speech amongst other things. You must allow me to give you a little history. Rycroft, don’t keep all the wine at your end of the table, or the ladies will go short.’ (By this time the dessert was on the table.) ‘The brother of those Misses Thorpe—rather an eccentric fellow, but eccentric in the best of ways—after living long enough to give

promise of ending his days in bachelorhood, made a journey to London, and to the great astonishment of his sisters, brought a wife down with him. From what you have heard to-night, you may understand that the Thorpes are not great guns in this neighbourhood ; nevertheless, the news of Edward Thorpe's marriage produced a great sensation ; perhaps because it was a settled thing in most people's minds that Edward Thorpe was to be a bachelor, and nothing else ; perhaps because it was a settled thing in many people's minds that he was not to be anything of the kind. There was no mistake about the sensation, however produced. There was no mistake about his wife being cried down as much as if she had robbed a whole colony of unmarried women of their last matrimonial chance. She was nothing to look at ; she had no money ; she was of no family. There was not much of her any way, for she was almost a child in years. I was myself a bachelor at that time, and I had no share in the general excitement except as it afforded me amusement. Chance first introduced me to a personal acquaintance with her. I accompanied a friend who wished to visit the mine ; and whilst there, we were introduced to a very primitive school-house, erected by Edward Thorpe himself, and

maintained at his expense for the benefit of the children of the miners. A rough lot they were ; and over the girls presided this young Mrs. Thorpe. I am forgetting to tell you that Edward Thorpe was overlooker of a mine some miles distant.'

" ' I understand,' I said ; ' I have heard him spoken of.'

" ' That's all right. Mrs. Thorpe made a great impression upon myself and my friend ; the more so, perhaps, because of the work in which we found her occupied, and because of the strong contrast betwixt herself and the half-savages by whom she was surrounded. She was a slight-made young girl, with a pale, pretty face, half-hidden by a profusion of glossy dark-brown curls. But it was chiefly her manner that fascinated us. She was so gentle, so courteous, so frank, almost cordial, as if we were old friends whom she was welcoming, that, upon my soul, I myself felt half inclined to quarrel with Edward Thorpe for his good luck.'

" ' It's a wonder you didn't fall quite in love with her,' said Mrs. Frank, in what was surely her hardest manner.

" ' I did that,' said the doctor, coolly, ' but it was of no use. I began to court you shortly

afterwards, Polly, and my wooing prospered, as they say. Let bygones be bygones. Just attend to me, Miss Moore. The Thorpes, being nobody in particular, seemed to die out of recollection naturally, after the brother was married—there being no carnal craving abroad for the Misses Thórpe—and I (thanks to my wife, I expect) forgot them, as others did. Perhaps nine years had elapsed, when I was summoned to attend the only child of Edward Thorpe, a little girl, who, at seven years of age, was a marvel of learning. Her father had taken delight in instructing her, and she must have possessed marvellous capacity; but her mind was outgrowing her body, and I told Mr. Thorpe that her studies must be given up, or she must die. Her mother (looking, I thought, as young, as pale, and pretty as ever) followed earnestly on my side, and Edward Thorpe reluctantly consented that her studies should be given up for a time. But there was this difficulty in the way—the child took to her severe studies, and could not be made to feel an interest in anything else; so that she seemed in danger of pining away if these were withheld from her. It was an extraordinary case, and we were obliged to compromise. Three or four years after this,

I was again called to Edward Thorpe's, in order to attend an old lady who lived with him, and whom I supposed to be Mrs. Thorpe's grandmother. She lingered some months, and died, and Mrs. Thorpe seemed to be as affectionately attentive to her as she had been to her child. On this occasion, also, I could see no change in Mrs. Thorpe. While we in the world were growing elderly, she in her solitude seemed to retain her youth. And it was a complete solitude in which she lived ; for the house inhabited by Edward Thorpe had been built by an eccentric individual in the very heart of the rugged scenery surrounding the mine, and on a spot that was scarcely accessible. Mrs. Thorpe rarely saw more of the world than lay between this spot, and the schoolhouse, which she continued to attend, for the purpose of giving instruction to the children. Two or three times in the course of the year (not more, as I was informed by one of the miners) she passed over the heath in order to pay a visit to the Misses Thorpe. Sometimes (but only in case of sickness or death, or calamity of some kind occurring in the homes of the miners) she would walk as far as the village. I began to feel a real interest in this still young woman ; her sad, sweet, pale

face and graceful figure haunted me. There was something refreshing to me in the simplicity of her life and manners; in the gentleness of her speech. I often thought within myself that she, so every way fitted to adorn any society, must sometimes weary of the sameness of her recluse life, especially as she had lived in London, and had certainly been well brought up. Her evident sadness and patience helped to convince me that she was enduring rather than enjoying life. That she liked congenial society was made clear by the fact, that, so long as the old Vicar of Torwood lived, the two were inseparable companions. After his death there was no intelligent man or woman to supply his place. Then I was assured by Mr. Trevor, who knew more of Edward Thorpe than any one else, that the latter had a decided objection to his wife forming any acquaintances; so much so that he seemed put out by a visit from Mrs. Trevor, the only lady who paid that attention to the bride. Mrs. Trevor shortly afterwards declined in health, and died; and with her died all true, womanly interest in the young stranger. I learned from the Misses Winstay that Mrs. Thorpe was odd in her habits, that she would wander by herself among the rocks for hours

together, and that she rather shunned her sisters-in-law. All this led me to one conclusion; that Mrs. Thorpe was leading an unnatural life, and that she was not happy.'

" 'You really don't know how prosy you are, sometimes, doctor,' said Mrs. Frank. 'Is that the end of it?'

" 'I hope not,' I said. 'I am just beginning to feel intensely interested.'

" 'I thought you would be,' said the doctor; 'I felt sure of it.'

" 'Well, make an end as soon as you can, for the sake of everybody else,' said Mrs. Frank. 'Here is Elizabeth quite tired, I am sure.'

" 'Tired of what?' asked Elizabeth, just lifting her eyes from a small pocket-book in which she had been for some time writing with a pencil. 'Tired of Dr. Frank's talking, do you mean? I assure you I have not heard a word that he said—he does not disturb me in the least.'

" This small speech is not an unfavourable specimen of Elizabeth's usual style. There is at all times a hardness in her manner, an impertinence in her remarks, that are especially offensive in so young a girl. In the course of the day, this hardness and impertinence had borne rather heavily upon myself; but I was, fortunately,

in a state of mind to receive both with equanimity.

“ ‘Some years again passed,’ continued Dr. Frank, taking no further notice of the interruption, ‘and one day I was summoned to Burnham Craggs, by a note from Mrs. Thorpe, in which she informed me, that her husband had for some time been seriously ill, but that he resolutely rejected all medical assistance, so that she could only beg that I would pay him a visit, as if by chance, and give her the result of my observations. I went immediately, and found that Edward Thorpe had not long to live. His complaint was a peculiar one, and of some standing. It was a wasting away of the whole system; the food he took did not tend to nourish him; he had almost lost his voice. I saw that little could be done, but I recommended that he should visit the Island of Jersey, and take Mrs. Thorpe with him. I told him that such a change would do her much good. But he saw through the drift of my visit at once, and got almost angry. He was certainly a self-opinionated man, and he took his own course now, regardless of the wishes of those around him. He would not go to Jersey, he would not take medicine. He would not believe that

he was sick unto death, but he acted like a wise man under the circumstances, and made his will, which I witnessed. He left everything he possessed to his wife, and appointed Mr. Trevor as sole executor. The will was a generous one, a singularly trusting one for him, for in case of his wife marrying again he still left her with sole power over the property and his child.

“On this occasion of seeing Mrs. Thorpe, it struck me that she had suddenly become much older in appearance; she had a very care-worn look. It seemed to me that she had never fully grown into this life of hers, so as to feel quite at home in it. She did not take upon herself much authority, but deferred greatly to Miss Thorpe, whom I saw frequently at this time, the invalid allowing my visits as a friend, though he would have nothing to do with my physic or my advice. The daughter, by this time about fifteen years of age, and apparently as dull and common-place as a singularly precocious child could well become, evidently cleaved to the aunt rather than to the mother. I am not imaginative, I think, but at this time Mrs. Thorpe had to me the look of one conscious of being surrounded only by desolation. It was a sad, hopeless, apathetic look, but not so fixed as

to give one the idea of absolute resignation. Occasionally, there was a restless irritability about her, that she kept down with effort, but could not altogether conceal from me. Her eyes, if you encountered them unawares, wore that dreaminess of look that betokens a mind occupied with thoughts and scenes that have little to do with the present. Having watched her thus long, I felt more interested in her than ever. She was a sealed book to me, but I could guess at the contents by what was inscribed on the cover. Hers could scarcely have been a match of affection; yet in Edward Thorpe she would most probably lose her last as well as her best friend; for, according to all accounts, she was the sole survivor of her own family—a family unknown even to the Misses Thorpe. Hers appeared to me to be one of those tender, womanly natures that do not stand well alone.

“ ‘ I was assured of one thing—that her earnest and affectionate attentions to her husband were real. There was nothing sham about her. She exerted all her influence in order to induce him to accept medical aid; she clung to the hope that he might live. He died, however; and much sooner than he would have done if he had not been so obstinate. It was a matter

of taste and feeling with him ; he gratified himself, and bore the consequences, like the philosopher he was ; knowing that the postponement of the catastrophe would really have amounted to nothing with others.

“ ‘ After his death, Mrs. Thorpe removed with her daughter to Moorlands, and I again lost sight of her for a time. Mr. Trevor, as executor, had several interviews with her, and she interested him very much. He found her a complete child in business matters, and he also found the Misses Thorpe, as usual, particularly sharp. They contrived to wield, as by proxy, all the power that her husband left in her hands. They exerted authority over her in other ways. Mr. Trevor wished to introduce his eldest daughter to her, and told her so in the presence of the Misses Thorpe, who rose in a body, and declared that at their time of life they could not be put out of the way by having strange visitors come to the house. Besides, they knew that it would be contrary to their brother’s wish. Mrs. Thorpe gave way to them at once, thanking Mr. Trevor for the kind feeling of which she might not take advantage. \

“ ‘ Mr. Trevor thought it best not to interfere further, because as she was living with her

sisters-in-law, any offence to the latter would only tend to make her life amongst them more uncomfortable. But I fired up a little at this account, and with the help of Jane Trevor and Lucy, I formed divers plans for the emancipation of Mrs. Thorpe ; but all came to nothing ; and for nearly twelvemonths I again lost sight of her. Six or seven weeks ago I heard that she had been summoned to London by a sister whom she had supposed to be dead. She went, leaving her daughter at Moorlands. This morning on entering the house I was at once assailed by the two Misses Thorpe, not on the subject of their sister's illness, but the extraordinary subject, to me, of their sister-in-law's unwarrantable conduct in having taken the liberty of quitting Moorlands, and absenting herself for a long time, in defiance of their displeasure and remonstrances ; and they concluded by asserting that the sudden illness of the elder Miss Thorpe had been occasioned by this act of disobedience which had preyed upon her mind. I said, pretty coolly, that it was a pity she had so allowed it to prey on her mind, and desired to be shown to her room at once. I found her in the state I have described, and after remaining with her some hours, left her in charge of Jackson, who accompanied me. On

descending to the parlour, the two Misses Thorpe, whom I made acquainted with their sister's condition, instead of bewailing themselves, therefore, again launched out against the absent Mrs. Thorpe. They admitted that she had written frequently; that she accounted for her prolonged absence. She had found her sister, as she had expected to do, and she was naturally lingering at the side of one from whom she had been separated more than nineteen years, and whom she had not hoped to meet in this world again. She also spoke in her letters of having met with a gentleman who in her girlhood was the kindest of friends to herself and others of her family. These details from her letters, so open and so like herself, pleased me, but afforded matter of fresh offence to the Misses Thorpe. They offered to show me these letters, but I declined, knowing that they were not written for such general scrutiny. Indeed, this offer of the Misses Thorpe compelled me to launch out as I had previously been disposed to do. I told them that I did not at all understand what it was they objected to in Mrs. Thorpe's conduct; that on receiving such a letter as they described, she could not do less than she had done. "And Mrs. Thorpe," I continued, warming with my subject, "has a

right to do as she pleases. In such a matter as this, her husband left her, free and uncontrollable. I, for one, say at once that none of you have any business to meddle.'

"It provoked me to see how coolly Mrs. Thorpe's daughter sat and heard this, and said not a word. With a very mysterious air, one of the Misses Thorpe drew me aside. She assured me that I did not understand the matter. The letter indisputably received by Mrs. Thorpe had not been shown to any one—she scrupulously kept it to herself. The Misses Thorpe requested to see it, and she declined complying with their request. Therefore the Misses Thorpe did not believe her report of the letter. Therefore they opposed her, when she declared that it was her intention to proceed at once to London. This Miss Thorpe said something further about her "dishonoured brother" that I did not fully comprehend; but that compelled me to exclaim—"God defend us from imaginations!" Then followed this description of a scene:—Mrs. Thorpe had requested that she might have a conveyance to take her to Selby early on the morning after receiving the letter, so that she might be in time for the coach bound to London, where her sister was residing.

The Misses Thorpe, opposed to her going, declared that she should not have such conveyance. Mrs. Thorpe, assuming some authority, desired a servant to request the loan of a conveyance from a neighbour. The Misses Thorpe counteracted this order, and the servant obeyed *them*. Then Mrs. Thorpe, being quite determined to accomplish her object, declared that she would walk to Selby and remain there all night. Then the Misses Thorpe locked all the doors and made Mrs. Thorpe prisoner.

“ ‘She was so quiet (it is her sly way),’ continued Miss Martha Thorpe, ‘that we thought she might be brought to reason. Susan (that’s the youngest sister, that I had seen most of) wanted us to let her have her own way; but Susan was always soft, and we didn’t mind her. She sees now that she was wrong. Well, I declare to you that we made every door fast, and kept a good look-out; but the next morning Mrs. Thorpe was gone! If she’d been about anything good, she wouldn’t have gone in that way.’

“ ‘Why, you wouldn’t let her go in any other way,’ I said.

“ ‘However she got out of the house, and however she found her way to Selby, that had

never been there before, goodness only knows,' said Miss Martha.

"It equally surprised me, that this bit of gossip had not reached the ears of the people at Selby. But Miss Martha presently informed me that herself and her sisters used the precaution of not expressing any surprise, when they discovered her flight. They spoke before the servants as if they knew of her departure, and had aided in it. They had been exasperated into speaking as they did to me by Mrs. Thorpe's unsatisfactory letters, and by witnessing the effect produced by this whole affair (as they believed) upon their now dying sister. The letters were unsatisfactory in this way—Mrs. Thorpe did not give the names of her sister or her friend. Her letters were addressed to her at the chambers of a solicitor. When her daughter, at the suggestion of her aunts, requested to know the names of her new aunt and of the gentleman who was so old a friend, Mrs. Thorpe declined giving either for the present. This the maiden ladies considered to be a very bad sign indeed. I was shown a letter (it was entrusted to my care, to be put in the post), just written by Mrs. Thorpe's daughter, informing her mother of the catastrophe that had occurred, and

requiring her immediate return. It was a cold, cruel letter, dictated by the aunts, no doubt. Indeed I question whether that very learned child is at this present time capable of inditing a letter of herself. I said I thought it was unkindly worded; but as no one noticed the remark, I quietly waited the sealing of the letter and put it in my pocket. It will undoubtedly bring Mrs. Thorpe down in a hurry, and you may guess what her reception will be. It was a wish that Mrs. Thorpe could find some friend in this part of the country whose countenance and presence would be a stay to her, that made me think of you. I feel sure that you would like one another, if you could be brought together, and that is not impossible. Mrs. Thorpe has shown some resolution at last, and I hope she will go on in the same spirit. I flatter myself that she respects me very much; and the fact is, I am 'hoping to have the pleasure of introducing you to one another.'

"I was really pleased. 'Thank you very much, Dr. Frank,' I said. "I shall be most happy to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Thorpe.'

"'I can't have Mrs. Thorpe coming here,' said Mrs. Rycroft. 'I suppose you understand

that, Miss Moore. She's quite a nobody, and we're not used to mix with such people.'

" 'I don't like to hear of anybody being set down as nobody, though I don't expect everybody to take to my somebodies,' said Dr. Frank.

" 'We all know what you are,' said his wife. 'You always take to out-of-the-way people. Why, you might as well have asked Elizabeth to visit Mrs. Thorpe.'

" 'Oh! the Doctor knows that I don't pretend to be amiable,' said Elizabeth.

" 'I had been in a sort of commotion all the evening, growing upward or downward out of myself. I now said, much in Elizabeth's own tone :—

" 'There is certainly some merit in not pretending to be what we are not.'

" Elizabeth slightly elevated her eyebrows, but went on writing in her pocket-book.

" 'Well, there's truth in that,' said Dr. Frank; 'but it has often struck me that some people show to best advantage when they make an effort to appear to be anything but what they are. We should not get along as well as we do, if that was not an almost universal practice. I am a plain-dealing man, and I like plain-

dealing people. Plain dealing goes farthest in the long run.'

"What the Doctor said helped to determine me how to act. I was not prolonging my stay at Staunton Court for my own pleasure, and I saw no reason why I should remain there in a state of restraint. Both Mr. and Mrs. Rycroft had, to serve their own ends, paraded my independence not only of means but of character; and neither would have any right to complain if I proved that, in part at least, their report was correct. I determined to make a stand upon my independence of the latter kind.

" 'When I declared that I should like to be introduced to Mrs. Thorpe,' I said, 'I did not contemplate her coming here. Most certainly, if I have formed a correct estimate of her, she would object to come if she was asked. I believe I am something like Dr. Frank—I take to out-of-the-way people. Your very select circle may not satisfy me; and you must not expect to bind me down by rule and line; for hitherto I have been free to act as I pleased; and I must be free still. You must allow me to visit Mrs. Thorpe, if she will allow of my visits—which I am sorry to say I doubt.'

"The plain truth, as uttered by one individual

to another in common intercourse, has certainly an unmannerly, boastful air about it—the more so if it is uttered in the blunt way that best becomes what is true. It suited me to be very blunt just then, and I created a sensation. Mr. Rycroft, who had been very silent and thoughtful, suddenly lifted his head and looked at me. Mrs. Rycroft grew excessively red. Elizabeth closed her pocket-book, and flung her pencil to the other end of the table, regarding me all the while with an excessively rude stare. Mrs. Frank sat rigidly in her chair, quite aghast. Her husband poured out a glass of wine, and sat sipping it in luxurious silence.

“‘Well, really,’ said Mrs. Rycroft, after an awful pause of some minutes, ‘if our company doesn’t suit you I shall be sorry. I’m sure we keep company with the best sort of people to be found hereabouts.’

“‘Yet some of the best sort may escape your observation,’ I said, ‘and you must allow me to discover these for myself. I cannot be fettered by social distinctions: wealth and position weigh little with me; and I take to Mrs. Thorpe because she is not recommended to me in the ordinary way. It was understood before to-night that I was an odd person.’

“ ‘Once for all,’ said Mr. Rycroft, speaking in an authoritative tone, ‘it is to be understood that my niece is to have her own way. I thought that was understood already. Miss Moore is independent, and accustomed to do as she likes. She is eccentric, and a little eccentricity wont do any of us any harm. She’ll stir us up a bit—do us good, perhaps. Dr. Frank, pass the claret.’ ”

“ It suited Mr. Rycroft to take my part; he could not well do otherwise. Elizabeth, after looking fixedly at her father, flung her pocket-book across the table after her pencil, rose from her chair, and bounced out of the room, muttering something that sounded to me very like ‘humbug.’ Am *I* a ‘humbug?’ and has Elizabeth found me out? The end may show. In the meantime I cannot be on worse terms with Elizabeth than I previously was when it suited her own pleasure to put me down. ”

“ Mrs. Rycroft was certainly a good deal influenced by my words and manner, or Mr. Rycroft’s, or both. ”

“ ‘To be sure,’ she said, ‘Catherine must do as she likes while she’s with us; I didn’t mean to say anything against that, because I’m sure she wouldn’t do anything that was quite wrong; ”

and when people's hodd they can't help it, I suppose. Well,' she continued, her natural character peeping out, as it will do sometimes, 'I can't but say that I like a bit of hoddness sometimes. It's very dull whên people's just proper all along, and nothing else. And so, Catherine, you naughty girl, I expect you'll help to keep us alive this winter.'

" 'My dear aunt,' I said (I had never called her aunt before), 'I can only say that I have no wish to displease you, and that I hope I shall never do anything that you can seriously disapprove of.'

" 'Well, that's right, and I don't think you ever will,' she said, showing an inclination to enter into the whole spirit of the moment.

" Mrs. Frank, who had hitherto appeared afraid of being too civil to me, now assumed a graciousness of manner that somehow did not sit well upon her.

" 'My dear,' she said (and the expression sounded unnatural to me as it came from her thin, severe-looking lips), 'I must warn you not to take the Doctor as a guide in anything. If it hadn't been for him there would have been no unpleasantness. I'm sure he ought to be ashamed of himself.'

“ ‘I’m happy to say that I’m not at all ashamed of myself,’ said the Doctor, who, with his arms leaned forward on the table, and his kind face all a-glow, looked the very personification of self-satisfaction ; ‘ what I said to Miss Moore I was under an obligation to say to somebody — under an obligation, because I couldn’t keep it to myself. I have said it to the right person, I know. Never you mind, Miss Moore ; I’ve a notion that Mrs. Thorpe will turn out to be a princess in disguise, or a lady in her own right at the least ; and we two, who have taken to her as plain Mrs. Thorpe, may find our own reward by and by. I didn’t attend her grandmother in her illness for nothing. The old lady unconsciously made some revelations that I kept to myself. I shall tell you all before long. Ah, you may look, you very exclusive people ; but I’ve nothing to say to you.’ ”

“ ‘ Now Doctor, do tell us all about it,’ said Mrs. Rycroft, laughing till her ample person shook all over. ‘ Now, come, I’ll confess that I feel quite interested in Mrs. Thorpe ; I ham, positively.’ When she is quite in earnest, Mrs. Rycroft aspirates her h’s most frequently.

“ ‘ It won’t do,’ said the Doctor, doggedly.

‘Miss Moore and I intend to have it all to ourselves.’

“‘It’s the Doctor’s nonsense, which he may call sense, but I don’t,’ said Mrs. Frank. ‘If there had been anything in it, I should have got it out of him long ago.’

“‘That’s your mistake,’ said the Doctor, coolly. ‘I wait my opportunities for telling what is best worth hearing. I declare to you, Miss Moore, that I have reasons for believing that Mrs. Thorpe belongs to a family of rank. I am only afraid that she may slip through our fingers before we have time to make up to her. Here is an aristocratic connection that has been within anybody’s grasp for the last nineteen years, and nobody would touch it with the tongs! So much for exclusiveness.’

“Of course I knew that this was a ruse of the Doctor’s; he understood his company better than I did. It astonished me to see how they pricked up their ears at this mock information; how eager they were to hear more, believing it all true. Even Mr. Rycroft fell into the trap. Why, I said, ‘even’ I don’t know, for he was quite as likely as anybody else present.

“‘Dear me,’ he said, ‘I’ve often thought of inviting Thorpe here, but he seemed to be so

much out of the way. Now I think of it, his wife had a superior sort of look. You are right, Doctor, in thinking that Catherine would take to her and she to Catherine—quite right.’

“And I cannot convey to you any idea of the eagerness with which Mrs. Rycroft enlisted herself on this side of the question. She certainly never was meant to shine in the most polished circles, to which she aspires, for her self-possession may at any time be upset at a moment’s notice. The mutations of the last few minutes astonished myself not a little.

“‘Well now,’ said Mrs. Rycroft, laughing heartily, as she always does when she is excited in a pleasant way, ‘I’m sure Catherine is the very person to make friends with Mrs. Thorpe. She’ll astonish those old maids so that they won’t have a word to say for themselves. I think the best plan will be for Catherine to go to Moorlands at once, and make up to the daughter. She could go in the carriage with you, Doctor, and take young Miss Thorpe out for a drive. That would be a good beginning. I’m sure if she once got to Moorlands, she’d have it all her own way.’

“Mrs. Rycroft said more in favour of this summary measure, but I objected, and the Doctor

hummed. Finally, we two were left to arrange the matter between ourselves. So you see, Grace, that at present I have enough on my hands. And in the course of three weeks how rapidly the scenes of this life have been shifted for me! I have lost some old associations, and am surrounded by new interests. How much there is that I wish to do—that I am expected to do! And how unmistakeably my heart warms towards nearly all the personages of my little drama—the Halletts, the Trevors, Miss Osborne, Mrs. Thorpe, Dr. Frank. It is to Grace, that I already entertain a loving care for all these; I am selfishly interested in them; I anticipate that they may be benefited by my friendliness, or that I may be benefited by theirs. What will be the amount of the pain, and what of the pleasure, some time hence? I can only hope to play my own part well and wisely with God's help."

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END OF VOL. II.



